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The Holy of Holies

THE
HOLY OF HOLIES

*SERMONS ON FOURTEENTH, FIFTEENTH, AND
SIXTEENTH CHAPTERS OF THE
GOSPEL OF JOHN*

BY
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I.

Faith in God, one with faith in Christ.

“Let not your heart be troubled . . . believe in God,
believe also in Me.”—JOHN xiv. 1.



THE twelve were sitting in the upper chamber, stupefied with the dreary, half-understood prospect of Christ's departure. He, forgetting His own burden, turns to comfort and encourage them. These sweet and great words most singularly blend gentleness and dignity. Who can reproduce the cadence of soothing tenderness, soft as a mother's hand, in that "Let not your heart be troubled"? And who can fail to feel the tone of majesty in that "Believe in God, believe also in Me"?

The Greek presents an ambiguity in the latter half of the verse, for the verb may be either indicative or imperative, and so we may read four different ways, according as we render each of the two "believes" in either of these two fashions. Our Authorised and Revised Versions concur in adopting the *indicative* "Ye believe" in the former clause and the imperative in the latter. But I venture

to think that we get a more true and appropriate meaning if we keep both clauses in the same mood, and read them both as imperatives: "Believe in God, believe also in Me." It would be harsh, I think, to take one as an affirmation and the other as a command. It would be irrelevant, I think, to remind the disciples of their belief in God. It would break the unity of the verse and destroy the relation of the latter half to the former, the former being a negative precept—"Let not your heart be troubled"—and the latter being a positive one—"Instead of being troubled, believe in God, and believe in Me." So, for all these reasons, I venture to adopt the reading I have indicated.

I.—Now in these words the first thing that strikes me is that Christ here points to Himself as the object of precisely the same religious trust which is to be given to God.

It is only our familiarity with these words that blinds us to their wonderfulness and their greatness. Try to hear them for the first time, and to bring into remembrance the circumstances in which they were spoken. Here is a man sitting amongst a handful of His friends, who is within four and twenty hours of a shameful death, which to all appearance was the utter annihilation of all His claims and hopes, and He says, "Trust in God, and trust in Me!" I think that if we had heard that for the first time, we should have understood a little better than some of us do the depth of its meaning.

What is it that Christ asks for here? Or rather let me say, What is it that Christ offers to us here? For we must not look at the words as a demand or as

a command, but rather as a merciful invitation to do what it is life and blessing to do. It is a very low and inadequate interpretation of these words which takes them as meaning little more than "Believe in God, believe that He is; believe in Me, believe that I am." But it is scarcely less so to suppose that the mere assent of the understanding to His teaching is all that Christ is asking for here. By no means; what He invites us to goes a great deal deeper than that. The essence of it is an act of the will and of the heart, not of the understanding at all. A man may believe in Him as a historical person, may accept all that is said about Him here, and yet not be within sight of the trust in Him which He here speaks of. For the essence of the whole is not the intellectual process of assent to a proposition, but the intensely personal act of yielding up will and heart to a living person. Faith does not grasp a doctrine but a heart. The trust which Christ requires is the bond that unites souls with Him; and the very life of it is entire committal of myself to Him in all my relations and for all my needs, and absolute utter confidence in Him as all-sufficient for everything that I can require. Let us get away from the cold intellectualism of "belief" into the warm atmosphere of "trust," and we shall understand better than by many volumes what are the meaning and the sphere and the power and the blessedness of that faith which Christ requires.

Further, note that, whatever may be this believing in Him which He asks from us or invites us to render, it is precisely the same thing which He bids us render to God. The two clauses in the original

bring out that idea even more vividly than in our version, because the order of the words in the latter clause is inverted; and they read literally thus:—"Believe in God, in Me also believe." The purpose of the inversion is to put these two, God and Christ, as close together as possible; and to put the two identical emotions at the beginning and at the end, at the two extremes and outsides of the whole sentence. Could language be more deliberately adopted and moulded, even in its consecution and arrangement, to enforce this thought, that whatever it is that we give to Christ, it is the very same thing that we give to God? And so He here proposes Himself as the worthy and adequate recipient of all these emotions of confidence, submission, resignation, which make up religion in its deepest sense.

That tone is by no means singular in this place. It is the uniform tone and characteristic of our Lord's teaching. Let me remind you just in a sentence of one or two instances. What did He think of Himself Who stood up before the world and, with arms outstretched, like that great white Christ in Thorwaldsen's lovely statue, said to all the troop of languid and burdened and fatigued ones crowding at His feet:—"Come unto Me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? That surely is a Divine prerogative. What did He think of Himself Who said, "All men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father"? What did He think of Himself Who, in that very Sermon on the Mount (to which the advocates of a maimed and mutilated Christianity tells us they pin their faith, instead of to mystical doctrines) declared that He Himself was the

Judge of humanity, and that all men should stand at His bar and receive from Him "according to the deeds done in their body"? Upon any honest principle of interpreting these Gospels, and unless you avowedly go picking and choosing amongst His words, accepting this and rejecting that, you cannot eliminate from the Scriptural representation of Jesus Christ the fact that He claimed as His own the emotions of the heart to which only God has a right and only God can satisfy.

I do not dwell upon that point, but I say, in one sentence, we have to take that into account if we would estimate the character of Jesus Christ as a teacher and as a man. I would not turn away from Him any imperfect conceptions, as they seem to me, of His nature and His work—rather I would foster them, and lead them on to a fuller recognition of the full Christ—but this I am bound to say, that for my part I believe that nothing but the wildest caprice, dealing with the Gospels according to one's own subjective fancies, irrespective altogether of the evidence, can strike out from the teaching of Christ this its characteristic difference. What signalizes Him, and separates Him from all other religious teachers, is not the clearness or the tenderness with which He reiterated the truths about the Divine Father's love, or about morality, and justice, and truth, and goodness; but *the* peculiarity of His call to the world is, "Believe in Me." And if He said that, or anything like it, and if the representations of His teaching in these four Gospels, which are the only source from which we get any notion of Him at all, are to be accepted, why, then, one of two things. Either He was wrong, and then

He was a crazy enthusiast, only acquitted of blasphemy because convicted of insanity; or else—or else—He was “God, manifest in the flesh.” It is no use bowing down before a fancy portrait of a bit of Christ, and exalting the humble sage of Nazareth, and leaving out the very thing that makes the difference between Him and all others, namely, these either audacious or most true claims to be the Son of God, the worthy Recipient and the adequate Object of man’s religious emotions. “Believe in God, in Me also believe.”

II.—Now, secondly, notice that faith in Christ and faith in God are not two, but one.

These two clauses on the surface present juxtaposition. Looked at more closely they present interpretation and identity. Jesus Christ does not merely set Himself up by the side of God, nor are we worshippers of two Gods when we bow before Jesus and bow before the Father; but faith in Christ is faith in God, and faith in God which is not faith in Christ is imperfect, incomplete, and will not long last. To trust in Him is to trust in the Father; to trust in the Father is to trust in Him.

What is the underlying truth that is here? How comes it that these two objects blend into one, like two figures in a stereoscope; and that the faith which flows to Jesus Christ rests upon God? This is the underlying truth, that Jesus Christ, Himself Divine, is the Divine Revealer of God. I need not dwell upon the latter of these two thoughts: how there is no real knowledge of the real God in the depth of His love, the tenderness of His nature or the lustrousness of His holiness; how there is no certitude; how the God that we

see outside of Jesus Christ is sometimes doubt, sometimes hope, sometimes fear, always far off and vague, an abstraction rather than a person, "a stream of tendency" without us, that which is unnameable, and the like. I need not dwell upon the thought that Jesus Christ has showed us a Father, has brought a God to our hearts Whom we can love, Whom we can know really though not fully, of Whom we can be sure, with a certitude which is as deep as the certitude of our own personal being; that He has brought to us a God before Whom we do not need to crouch far off, that He has brought to us a God whom we can trust. Very significant is it that Christianity alone puts the very heart of religion in the act of trust. Other religions put it in dread, worship, service, and the like. Jesus Christ alone says—the bond between men and God is that blessed one of trust. And He says so because He alone brings us a God whom it is not ridiculous to tell men to trust.

And, on the other hand, the truth that underlies this is not only that Jesus Christ is the Revealer of God, but that He Himself is Divine. The light shines through a window, but the light and the glass that makes it visible have nothing in common with one another. The Godhead shines through Christ, but *He* is not a mere transparent medium. It is Himself that He is showing us when He is showing us God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen"—not the light that streams through Me—but "hath seen, in Me, the Father." And because He is Himself Divine and the Divine Revealer, therefore the faith that grasps Him is inseparably one with the faith that grasps God. Men could look upon a Moses, an Isaiah, or a Paul,

and in them recognise the eradiation of the Divinity that imparted itself through them, but the medium was forgotten in proportion as that which it revealed was beheld. You cannot forget Christ in order to see God more clearly, but to behold Him is to behold God.

And if that be true, these two things follow. One is that all imperfect revelation of God is prophetic of, and leads up towards, the perfect revelation in Jesus Christ. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives that truth in a very striking fashion. He compares all other means of knowing God to fragmentary syllables of a great word, of which one was given to one man and another to another. God "spoke at sundry times and in manifold portions to the fathers by the prophets"; but the whole word is articulately uttered by the Son, in whom He has "spoken unto us in these last times." The imperfect revelation, by means of those who were merely mediums for the revelation, leads up to Him who is Himself the Revelation, the Revealer, and the Revealed.

And in like manner all the imperfect faith that, laying hold of other fragmentary means of knowing God, has tremulously tried to trust Him, finds its climax and consummate flower in the full-blossomed faith that lays hold upon Jesus Christ. The unconscious prophecies of heathendom; the trust that, up and down the world, select souls have put in One whom they dimly apprehended; the faith of the Old Testament saints; the rudimentary beginnings of a knowledge of God and of a trust in Him which are found in men to-day, and amongst us, outside of the circle of Christianity—all these things are as manifestly

incomplete as a building reared half its height, and wait for the corner-stone to be brought forth—the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the intelligent and full acceptance of Him and faith in Him.

And another thing is true, that without faith in Christ such faith in God as is possible is feeble, incomplete, and will not long last. Historically a pure theism is all but impotent. There is only one example of it on a large scale in the world, and that is a kind of bastard Christianity—Mohammedanism; and we all know what good that is as a religion. There are plenty of people amongst us now-a-days who claim to be very advanced thinkers, and who call themselves Theists, and not Christians. Well, I venture to say that that is a phase that will not last. There is little substance in it. The God Whom men know outside of Jesus Christ is a poor, nebulous thing; an idea, not a reality. He, or rather It, is a film of cloud shaped into a vague form, through which you can see the stars. It has little power to restrain. It has less to inspire and impel. It has still less to comfort; it has least of all to satisfy the heart. You will have to get something more substantial than the far-off god of an unchristian Theism if you mean to sway the world and to satisfy men's hearts.

And so, dear brethren, I come to this—perhaps the word may be fitting for some that listen to me—“Believe in God,” and that you may, “believe also in Christ.” For sure I am that when the stress comes, and you *want* a god, unless your god is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, he will be a powerless deity. If you have not faith in Christ, you will not long have faith in God that is vital and worth anything.

III.—Lastly, this trust in Christ is the secret of a quiet heart.

It is no use saying to men, "Let not your hearts be troubled," unless you finish the verse and say, "Believe in God, believe also in Him." For unless we trust we shall certainly be troubled. The state of man in this world is like that of some of those sunny islands in southern seas, around which there often rave the wildest cyclones, and which carry in their bosoms, beneath all their riotous luxuriance of verdant beauty, hidden fires, which ever and anon shake the solid earth and spread destruction. Storms without and earthquakes within—that is the condition of humanity. And where is the "rest" to come from? All other defences are weak and poor. We have heard about "pills against earthquakes." That is what the comforts and tranquilizing which the world supplies may fairly be likened to. Unless we trust we are, and we shall be, and should be, "troubled."

If we trust we may be quiet. Trust is always tranquility. To cast a burden off myself on other's shoulders is always a rest. But trust to Jesus Christ brings infinitude on my side. Submission is repose. When we cease to kick against the pricks they cease to prick and wound us. Trust opens the heart, like the windows of the Ark tossing upon the black and fatal flood, for the entrance of the peaceful dove with the olive branch in its mouth. Trust brings Christ to my side in all His tenderness and greatness and sweetness. If I trust, "all is right that seems most wrong." If I trust, conscience is quiet. If I trust, "life becomes a solemn scorn of ills." If I trust, inward unrest is changed into tranquillity, and mad

passions are cast out from him that sits clothed and in his right mind at the feet of Jesus.

“The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest.” But if I trust, my soul will become like the glassy ocean when all the storms sleep, and “birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave.” “Peace I leave with you.” “Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in Me.”

Help us, O Lord, to yield our hearts to Thy dear Son, and in Him to find Thyself and eternal rest.



II.

“Many Mansions.”

“In My Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you.”—JOHN xiv. 2.



TORROW needs simple words for its consolation ; and simple words are the best clothing for the largest truths. These eleven poor men were crushed and desolate at the thought of Christ’s going ; they fancied that if He left them they lost Him. And so, in simple, childlike words, which the weakest could grasp, and in which the most troubled could find peace, He said to them, after having encouraged their trust in Him, “There is plenty of room for you as well as for Me where I am going ; and the frankness of our intercourse in the past might make you sure that if I were going to leave you I would have told you all about it. Did I ever hide from you anything that was painful ? Did I ever allure you to follow Me by false promises ? Should I have kept silence about it if our separation was to be eternal ?” So, simply, as a mother might her babe upon her breast, He soothes their sorrow. And yet, in the quiet words, so level to the lowest apprehension, there

lie great truths, far deeper than we yet have appreciated, and which will enfold themselves in their majesty and their greatness through eternity. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you."

I.—Now note, in these words, first, the "Father's house," and its ample room.

There is only one other occasion recorded in which our Lord used this expression, and it occurs in this same Gospel near the beginning; where in the narrative of the first cleansing of the temple we read that He said: "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise." The earlier use of the words may help to throw light upon one aspect of this latter employment of it, for there blend in the image the two ideas of what I may call domestic familiarity, and of that great future as being the reality of which the earthly temple was intended to be the dim prophecy and shadow. Its courts, its many chambers, its ample porches with room for thronging worshippers represented in some poor way the wide sweep and space of that higher house; and the sense of Sonship, which drew the Boy to His Father's house in the earliest hours of conscious childhood, speaks here.

Think for a moment of how sweet and familiar the conception of heaven as the Father's house makes it to us. There is something awful, even to the best and holiest souls, in the thought of even the glories beyond. The circumstances of death, which is its portal, our utter unacquaintance with all that lies behind the veil, the terrible silence and distance which falls upon our dearest ones as they are sucked into the cloud, all tend to make us feel that there is much that is solemn

and awful even in the thought of eternal future blessedness. But how it is all softened when we say, "My Father's house." Most of us have long since left behind us the sweet security, the sense of the absence of all responsibility, the assurance of defence and provision, which used to be ours when we lived as children in a father's house here. But we may all look forward to the renewal, in far nobler form, of these early days, when the father's house meant the inexpugnable fortress where no evil could befall us, the abundant home where all wants were supplied, and where the shyest and timidest child could feel at ease and secure. It is all coming again, brother! And amidst the august and unimaginable glories of that future the old feeling of being little children, nestling safe in the Father's house, will fill our quiet hearts once more.

And, then, consider how the conception of that future as the Father's house suggests answers to so many of our questions about the relationship of the inmates to one another. Are they to dwell isolated in their several mansions? Is that the way in which children in a home dwell with each other? Surely if He be the Father, and heaven be His house, the relation of the redeemed to one another must have in it more than all the sweet familiarity and unrestrained frankness which subsists in the families of earth. A solitary heaven would be but half a heaven, and would ill correspond with the hopes that inevitably spring from the representation of it as "my Father's house."

But consider, further, that this great and tender name for heaven has its deepest meaning in the

conception of it as a spiritual state of which the essential elements are the loving manifestation and presence of God as Father, the perfect consciousness of sonship, the happy union of all the children in one great family, and the derivation of all their blessedness from their elder Brother.

The earthly temple, to which there is some allusion in this great metaphor, was the place in which the Divine glory was manifested to seeking souls, though in symbol, yet also in reality, and the representation of our text blends the two ideas of the free, frank intercourse of the home and of the magnificent revelations of the holy of holies. Under either aspect of the phrase, whether we think of "my Father's house" as temple or as home, it sets before us, as the main blessedness and glory of heaven, the vision of the Father, the consciousness of sonship, and the complete union with Him. There are many subsidiary and more outward blessednesses and glories which shine dimly through the haze of metaphors and negations, by which alone a state of which we have no experience can be revealed to us; but these are secondary. The heaven of heaven is the possession of God the Father through the Son in the expanding spirits of His sons. The sovereign and filial position which Jesus Christ in His manhood occupies in that higher house, and which He shares with all those who by Him have received the adoption of sons, is the very heart and nerve of this great metaphor.

But I think we must go a step further than that, and recognise that in the image there is inherent the teaching that that glorious future is not merely a state, but also a place. Local associations are not to

be divorced from the words ; and although we can say but little about such a matter, yet everything in the teaching of Scripture points to the thought that howsoever true it may be that the essence of heaven is condition, yet that also heaven has a local habitation, and is a place in the great universe of God. Jesus Christ has at this moment a human body, glorified. That body, as Scripture teaches us, is somewhere, and where He is there shall also His servant be. In the context He goes on to tell us that "He goes to prepare a place for us," and though I would not insist upon the literal interpretation of such words, yet distinctly the drift of the representation is in the direction of localising, though not of materialising, the abode of the blessed. So I think we can say, not merely that *what* He is that shall also His servants be, but that *where* He is there shall also His servants be. And from the representation of my text, though we cannot fathom all its depths, we can at least grasp this, which gives solidity and reality to our contemplations of the future, that heaven is a place, full of all sweet security and homelike repose, where God is made known in every heart and to every consciousness as a loving Father, and of which all the inhabitants are knit together in the frankest fraternal intercourse, conscious of the Father's love, and rejoicing in the abundant provisions of His royal house.

And then there is a second thought to be suggested from these words, and that is of the ample room in this great house. The original purpose of the words of my text, as I have already reminded you, was simply to soothe the fears of a handful of disciples.

There was room where Christ went for eleven poor men. Yes, room enough for them! but Christ's prescient eye looked down the ages, and saw all the unborn millions that would yet be drawn to Him uplifted on the cross, and some glow of satisfaction flitted across His sorrow, as He saw from afar the result of the impending travail of His soul in the multitudes by whom God's heavenly house should yet be filled. "Many mansions!" The thought widens out far beyond our grasp. Perhaps that upper room, like most of the roof-chambers in Jewish houses, was open to the skies, and whilst He spoke, the innumerable lights that blaze in that clear heaven shone down upon them, and He may have pointed to these. The better Abraham perhaps looked forth, like His prototype, on the starry heavens, and saw in the vision of the future those who through Him should receive the adoption of sons and dwell for ever in the house of the Lord, "so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable."

Ah, brethren! if we could only widen our measurement of the walls of the New Jerusalem to the measurement of that "golden rod which the man, that is, the angel," as John says, applied to it, we should understand how much bigger it is than any of these poor sects and communities of ours here on earth. If we would lay to heart, as we ought to do, the deep meaning of that indefinite "many" in my text, it would rebuke our narrowness. There will be a great many occupants of the mansions in heaven that Christian men here on earth—the most Catholic of them—will be very much surprised to see there.

and thousands will find their entrance there that never found their entrance into any communities of so-called Christians here on earth.

That one word "many" should deepen our confidence in the triumphs of Christ's Cross, and it may be used to heighten our own confidence as to our own poor selves. A chamber in the great temple waits for each of us, and the question is, Shall we occupy it, or shall we not? The old rabbis had a tradition which, like a great many of their apparently foolish sayings, covers in picturesque guise a very deep truth. They said that, however many the throngs of worshippers who came up to Jerusalem at the passover, the streets of the city and the courts of the sanctuary were never crowded. And so it is with that great city. There is room for all. There are throngs, but no crowds. Each finds a place in the ample sweep of the Father's house, like some of the great palaces that barbaric Eastern kings used to build, in whose courts armies might encamp, and the chambers of which were counted by the thousand. And surely in all that ample accommodation, you and I may find some corner where we, if we will, may lodge for evermore.

I do not dwell upon subsidiary ideas that may be drawn from the expressions. "Mansions" means places of permanent abode, and suggests the two thoughts, so sweet to travellers and toilers in this fleeting, labouring life, of unchangeableness and of repose. Some have supposed that the variety in the attainments of the redeemed, which is reasonable and Scriptural, might be deduced from our text, but that does not seem to be relevant to our Lord's purpose.

One other suggestion may be made without en-

larging upon it. There is only another occasion in this Gospel in which the word here translated "mansions" is employed, and it is this: "We will come and make our abode with him." Our mansion is in God; God's dwelling-place is in us. So ask yourselves, Have you a share there in that heavenly home? When prodigal children go away from the father's house, sometimes a heart-broken parent will keep the boy's room just as it used to be when he was young and pure, and will hope and weary through long days for him to come back and occupy it again. God is keeping a room for you in His house; do you see that you fill it.

II.—In the next place, note here the sufficiency of Christ's revelation for our needs.

"If it were not so I would have told you." He sets Himself forward in very august fashion as being the revealer and the opener of that house for us. There is a singular tone about all our Lord's few references to the future—a tone of decisiveness; not as if He were speaking, as a man might do, that which he had thought out, or which had come to him, but as if He was speaking of what He had Himself beheld. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." He stands like one on a mountain top, looking down into the valleys beyond, and telling His comrades in the plain behind Him what He sees. He speaks of that unseen world always as One who had been in it, and who was reporting experiences, and not giving forth opinions. His knowledge was the knowledge of One who dwelt with the Father, and left the house in order to find and bring back His wandering brethren. It was "His own calm home, His habitation

from eternity"; and therefore He could tell us with decisiveness, with simplicity, with assurance, all which we need to know about the geography of that unknown land—the plan of that, by us unvisited, house. Very remarkable, therefore, is it that with this tone there should be such reticence in Christ's references to the future. The text implies the *rationale* of such reticence. "If it were not so I would have told you." I tell you all that you need, though I tell you a great deal less than you sometimes want.

The gaps in our knowledge of the future, seeing that we have such a Revealer as we have in Christ, are remarkable. But my text suggest this to us—we have as much as we need. *I* know, and many of *you* know, by bitter experience, how many questions, the answers to which would seem to us to be such a lightening of our burdens, our desolated and troubled hearts suggest about that future, and how vainly we ply heaven with questions and interrogate the unreplying Oracle. But we know as much as we need. We know that God is there. We know that it is the Father's house. We know that Christ is in it. We know that the dwellers there are a family. We know that sweet security and ample provision are there; and, for the rest, if we needed to have heard it, He would have told us.

My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.

Let the gaps remain. The gaps are part of the revelation, and we know enough for faith and hope.

May we not widen the application of that thought

to other matters than to our bounded and fragmentary conceptions of a future life? In times like the present, of doubt and unrest, it is a great piece of Christian wisdom to recognize the limitations of our knowledge and the sufficiency of the fragments that we have. What do we get a revelation for? To solve theological puzzles and dogmatic difficulties? to inflate us with the pride of *quasi*-omniscience? or to present to us God in Christ for faith, for love, for obedience, for imitation? Surely the latter, and for such purposes we have enough.

So let us recognize that our knowledge is very partial. A great stretch of wall is blank, and there is not a window in it. If there had been need for one, it would have been struck out. He has been pleased to leave many things obscure, not arbitrarily, to try our faith—for the implication of the words before us is that the relation between Him and us binds Him to the utmost possible frankness, and that all which we need and He can tell us He does tell—but for high reasons, and because of the very conditions of our present environment, which forbid the more complete and all-round knowledge.

So let us recognize our limitations. We know in part, and we are wise if we affirm in part. Hold by the Central Light, which is Jesus Christ. "Many things did Jesus which are not written in this book." And many gaps and deficiencies from a human point of view exist in the contexture of revelation. "But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ," for which enough has been told us, "and that, believing, ye may have life in His name." If that purpose be accomplished in us, God will not

have spoken, nor we have heard, in vain. Let us hold by the Central Light, and then the circumference of darkness will gradually retreat, and a wider sphere of illumination be ours, until the day when we enter our mansion in the Father's house, and then "in Thy Light shall we see light"; and we shall "know even as we are known."

Let your elder Brother lead you back, dear friend, to the Father's bosom, and be sure that if you trust Him and listen to Him, you will know enough on earth to turn earth into a foretaste of heaven, and will find at last your place in the Father's house, beside the Brother who has prepared it for you.



III.

The Forerunner.

“ I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself ; that where I am. there ye may be also.”—JOHN xiv. 2, 3.



HAT Divine simplicity and depth are in these words ! They carry us up into the unseen world, and beyond time ; and yet a little child can lay hold on them, and mourning hearts and dying men find peace and sweetness in them. A very familiar image underlies them. It was customary for travellers in those old days to send some of their party on in advance, to find lodging and make arrangements for them in some great city. Many a time one or other of the disciples had been “ sent before His face into every place where He Himself should come.” On that very morning two of them had gone in, at His bidding, from Bethany to make ready the table at which they were sitting. Christ here takes that office upon Himself. The emblem is homely, the thing meant is transcendent.

Not less wonderful is the blending of majesty and lowliness. The office which He takes upon Himself is

that of an inferior and a servant. And yet the discharge of it, in the present case, implies His authority over every corner of the universe, His immortal life, and the sufficiency of His presence to make a heaven. Nor can we fail to notice the blending of another pair of opposites: His certainty of His impending death, and His certainty, notwithstanding and thereby, of His continual work and His final return, are inseparably interlaced here. How comes it that, in all His premonitions of His death, Jesus Christ never spoke about it as failure or as the interruption or end of His activity, but always as the transition to, and the condition of, His wider work? "I go, and if I go I return, and take you to myself."

So, then, there are three things here, the departure with its purpose, the return, and the perfected union.

I.—The Departure.

Our Lord's going away from that little group was a journey in two stages. Calvary was the first; Olivet was the second. He means by the phrase the whole continuous process which begins with His death and ends in His ascension. Both are embraced in His words, and each co-operates to the attainment of the great purpose.

He prepares a place for us by His death. The High Priest, in the ancient ritual, once a year was privileged to lift the heavy veil and pass into the darkened chamber, where only the light between the cherubim was visible, because he bore in his hand the blood of the sacrifice. But in our New Testament system the path into the holiest of all, the realization of the most intimate fellowship with heavenly things and communion with God Himself, are made possible, and the way

patent for every foot, because Jesus has died. And as the communion upon earth, so the perfecting of the communion in the heavens. Who of us could step within those awful sanctities, or stand serene amidst the region of eternal light and stainless purity, unless, in His death, He had borne the sins of the world, and, having "overcome" its "sharpness" by enduring its blow, had "opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers"?

Old legends tell us of magic gates that resisted all attempts to force them, but upon which, if one drop of a certain blood fell, they flew open. And so, by His death, Christ has opened the gates and made the heaven of perfect purity a dwelling-place for sinful men.

But the second stage of His departure is that which more eminently is in Christ's mind here. He prepares a place for us by His entrance into and His dwelling in the heavenly places. The words are obscure because we have but few others with which to compare them, and no experience by which to interpret them. We know so little about the matter that it is not wise to say much; but, though there be vast tracts of darkness round the little spot of light, this should only make the spot of light more vivid and more precious. We know little, but we know enough for mind and heart to rest upon. Our ignorance of the ways, in which Christ by His ascension prepares a heaven for His followers, should neither breed doubt nor disregard of His assurance that He does.

If Christ had not ascended, would there have been "a place" at all? He has gone with a human body, which, glorified as it is, still has relations to space, and must be somewhere. And we may even say that

His ascending up on high has made a place where His servants are. But apart from that suggestion, which, perhaps, is going beyond our limits, we may see that Christ's presence in heaven is needful to make it a heaven for poor human souls. There, as here (Scripture assures us), and throughout eternity as to-day, Jesus Christ is the Mediator of all human knowledge and possession of God. It is from Him and through Him that there come to men, whether they be men on earth or men in the heavens, all that they know, all that they hope, all that they enjoy of the wisdom, love, beauty, peace, power, which flow from God. Take away from the heaven of the Christian expectation that which comes to the spirit through Jesus Christ, and you have nothing left. He and His mediation and ministration alone make the brightness and the blessedness of that high state. The very glories of all that lies beyond the veil would have an aspect appalling and bewildering to us, unless our Brother were there. Like some poor savages brought into a great city, or rustics into the presence of a king and his court, we should be ill at ease amidst the glories and solemnities of that future life unless we saw standing there our Kinsman, to whom we can turn, and who makes it possible for us to feel that it is home. Christ's presence makes heaven the home of our hearts.

Not only did He go to prepare a place, but He is continuously preparing it for us all through the ages. We have to think of a double form of the work of Christ, His past work in His earthly life, and His present in His exaltation. We have to think of a double form of His present activity—His work with

and in us here on earth, and His work for us there in the heavens. We have to think of a double form of His work in the heavens—that which the Scripture represents in a metaphor, the full comprehension of which surpasses our present powers and experiences, as being His priestly intercession ; and that which my text represents in a metaphor, perhaps a little more level to our apprehension, as being His preparing a place for us. Behind the veil there is a working Christ, who, in the heavens, is preparing a place for all that love Him.

II.—In the next place, note the Return.

The purpose of our Lord's departure, as set forth by Himself here, guarantees for us His coming back again. That is the force of the simple argumentation of my text, and of the pathetic and soothing repetition of the sweet words, "I go to prepare a place for you ; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself." Because the departure had for its purpose the preparing of the place, therefore it is necessarily followed by a return. He who went away as the Forerunner has not done His work until He comes back, and, as Guide, leads those for whom He had prepared the place, to the place which He had prepared for them.

Now that return of our Lord, like His departure, may be considered as having two stages. Unquestionably the main meaning and application of the words is to that final and personal coming which stands at the end of history, and to which the hopes of every Christian soul ought to be steadfastly directed. He will "so come in like manner as" He has gone. We are not to water down such words as these into any-

thing short of a return precisely corresponding in its method to the departure ; and as the departure was visible, corporeal, literal, personal, and local, so the return is to be visible, corporeal, literal, personal, local too. And He will come as He went, a visible Manhood, only throned amongst the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This is the aim that He sets before Him in His departure. He leaves in order that He may come back again.

And, oh ! dear friends, remember—and let us live in the strength of the remembrance—that this return ought to be the prominent subject of Christian aspiration and desire. There is much about the conception of that solemn return, with all the convulsions that attend it, and the judgment of which it is preliminary, that may well make men's hearts chill within them. But for you and me, if we have any love in our hearts and loyalty in our spirits to that King, " His coming " should be " prepared as the *morning*," and we should join in the great burst of rapture of many a psalm, which calls upon rocks and hills to break forth into singing, and trees of the field to clap their hands, because He cometh as the King to judge the earth. His own parable tells us how we ought to regard His coming. When the fig-tree's branch begins to supple, and the little leaves to push their way through the polished stem, then we know that summer is at hand. His coming should be as the approach of that glorious, fervid time, in which the sunshine has tenfold brilliancy and power, the time of ripened harvests and matured fruits, the time of joy for all creatures that love the sun. It should be the glad hope of all His servants.

We have a double witness to bear in the midst of this as of every generation. One half of the witness stretches backwards to the Cross, and proclaims "Christ has come"; the other reaches onwards to the Throne, and proclaims "Christ will come." Between these two high, uplifted piers swings the chain of the world's history, which closes with the return to judge and to save, of the Lord who came to die and has gone to prepare a place for us.

But do not let us forget that we may well take another point of view than this. Scripture knows of many comings of the Lord preliminary to, and in principle one with, His last coming. For nations, all great crises of their history are "comings of the Lord," the Judge. And we are strictly in the line of Scripture analogy when, in reference to individuals, we see in each single death a true coming of the Lord.

That is the point of view in which we ought to look upon a Christian's death-bed. "The Master *is come*, and calleth for thee." Beyond all secondary causes, deeper than disease or accident, lies the loving will of Him who is the Lord of life and of death. Death is Christ's minister, "mighty and beauteous, though His face be dark," and he, too, stands amidst the ranks of the "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation." It is Christ that says of one, "I will that this man tarry," and to another, "Go!" and he goeth. But whensoever a Christian man lies down to die, Christ says "Come!" and he comes. How that thought should hallow the death-chamber as with the print of the Master's feet! How it should quiet

our hearts and dry our tears! How it should change the whole aspect of that "shadow feared of man"! With Him for our companion, the lonely road will not be dreary; and though, in its anticipation, our timid hearts may often be ready to say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me," if we have Him by our sides, "even the night shall be light about us." The dying martyr beneath the city wall lifted up his face to the heavens, and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" It was the echo of the Master's promise, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself."

III.—Lastly, notice the Perfected Union.

The departure for such a purpose necessarily involved the return again. Both are stages in the process, which is perfected by complete union—"that where I am there ye may be also."

Christ, as I have been saying, is Heaven. His presence is all that we need for peace, for joy, for purity, for rest, for love, for growth. To be with Him, as He tells us in another part of these wonderful last words in the upper chamber, is to behold His glory. And to behold His glory, as John tells us in his Epistle, is to be like Him. So Christ's presence means the communication to us of all the lustre of His radiance, of all the whiteness of His purity, of all the depth of His blessedness, and of a share in His wondrous dominion. His glorified manhood will pass into ours, and they that are with Him where He is will rest as in the centre and home of their spirits, and find Him all-sufficient. His presence is my Heaven.

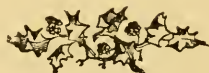
That is almost all we know. Oh! it is more than all we need to know. The curtain is the picture. It

is because what is there transcends in glory all our present experience that Scripture can only hint at it and describe it by negations—such as “no night,” “no sorrow,” “no tears,” “former things passed away”; and by symbols of glory and lustre gathered from all that is loftiest and noblest in human buildings and society. But all that is but secondary and poor. The living heart of the hope, and the lambent centre of the brightness, is, “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

And it is enough. It is enough to make the bond of union between us in the outer court and them in the holy place. Parted friends will fix to look at the same star at the same moment of the night and feel some union; and if we from amidst the clouds of earth, and they from amidst the pure radiance of their heaven, turn our eyes to the same Christ, we are not far apart. If He be the companion of each of us, He reaches a hand to each, and, clasping it, the parted ones are united; and “whether we wake or sleep we live *together*,” because we both live with Him.

Brother! Is Jesus Christ so much to you that a heaven which consists in nearness and likeness to Him has any attraction for you? Let Him be your Saviour, your Sacrifice, your Helper, your Companion. Obey Him as your King, love Him as your Friend, trust Him as your All. And be sure that then the darkness will be but the shadow of His hand, and instead of dreading death as that which separates you from life and love and action and joy, you will be able to meet it peacefully, as that which rends the thin veil, and unites you with Him who is the Heaven of heavens.

He has gone to prepare a place for us. And if we will let Him, He will prepare us for the place, and then come and lead us thither. "Thou wilt show me the path of life" which leads through death. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."



IV.

The Way, unknown and yet well known.

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him.”—JOHN xiv. 4—7.



OUR Lord has been speaking of His departure, of its purpose, of His return as guaranteed by that purpose, and of His servants' eternal and perfect reunion with Him. But even these cheering and calming thoughts do not exhaust His consolations, as they did not satisfy all the disciples' needs. They might still have said, "Yes; we believe that You will come back again, and we believe that we shall be together; but what about the parenthesis of absence?" And here is the answer, or at least part of it: "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know": or, if we adopt the shortened form which the Revised Version gives us, "Whither I go ye know the way."

When you say to a man, "You know the way,"

you mean "Come." And in these words there lie, as it seems to me, a veiled invitation to the disciples to come to Him before He came back for them, and the assurance that they, though separated, might still find and tread the road to the Father's house, and so be with Him still. They are not left desolate. The Christ who is absent is present as the path to Himself. And so the parenthesis is bridged across. Now in these verses we have several large and important lessons which I think may best be drawn by simply seeking to follow their course.

I.—Observe the disciples' unconscious knowledge.

Jesus Christ says: "Ye know the way and ye know the goal." One of them ventures flatly to contradict Him, and to traverse both assertions with a brusque and thoroughgoing negative. "We do *not* know whither Thou goest," says Thomas; "how can we know the way?" He is the same man in this conversation that we find him in the interview before our Lord's journey to raise Lazarus, and in the interview after our Lord's resurrection. In all three cases he appears as mainly under the dominion of sense, as slow to apprehend anything beyond its limits, as morbidly melancholy and disposed to take the blackest possible view of things—a practical pessimist—and yet with a certain kind of frank outspokenness which half redeems the other characteristics from blame. He could not understand all the Lord's deep words just spoken. His mind was befogged and dimmed, and he blurts out his ignorance, knowing that the best place to carry it to is to the Illuminator who can make it light. "We know *not* whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?"

Was Jesus right? was Thomas right? or were they both right? The fact is that Thomas and all his fellows knew, after a fashion, but they did not know that they knew. They had heard plenty in the past as to where Christ was going. Plainly enough it had been rung in their ears over and over again. It had made some kind of lodgment in their heads, and, in that sense, they did know. It is this unused and unconscious knowledge of theirs to which Christ appeals, and which He tries to draw out into consciousness and power when He says, "You know whither I am going, and you know the road." Is not that exactly what a patient teacher will do with some flustered child when he says to it: "Take time! You know it well enough if you will only think"? So the Master says here: "Do not be agitated and troubled in heart. Reflect, remember, overhaul your stores, and think what I have told you over and over again, and you will find that you *do* know whither I am going, and that you *do* know the way."

The patient gentleness of the Master with the slowness of the scholars is beautifully exemplified here, as is also the method, which He lovingly and patiently adopts, of sending men back to consult their own consciousness as illuminated by His teaching, and to see whether there is not lying somewhere, unrecked of and unemployed in some dusty corner of their mind, a truth that only needs to be dragged out and cleaned in order to show itself for what it is, the all-sufficient light and strength for the moment's need.

The dialogue is an instance of what is true about us all, that we have in our possession truths given

to us by Jesus Christ, the whole sweep and bearing of which, the whole majesty and power and illuminating capacity of which, we do not dream of yet. How much in our creeds lies dim and undeveloped! Time and circumstances and some sore agony of spirit are needed in order to make us realize the riches that we possess, and the certitudes to which our troubled spirits may cling; and the practice of far more patient, honest, profound meditation and reflection than finds favour with the average Christian man is needed, too, in order that the truths possessed may be possessed, and that we may know what we know, and understand the things that are given to us of God.

In all your creeds, there are large tracts that you, in some kind of a fashion, do believe; and yet they have no vitality in your consciousness nor power in your lives. And the Master here does with these disciples exactly what He is trying to do day by day with us, namely, fling us back on ourselves, or rather upon His revelation in us, and get us to fathom its depths and to walk round about its magnitudes, and so to understand the things that we say we believe.

All our knowledge is ignorance. Ignorance that confesses itself to Him is in the way of becoming knowledge. His light will touch the smoke and change it into red spires of flame. If you do not know, go to Him and say, "Lord! I do not." An accurate understanding of where the darkness lies is the first step to the light. We are meant to carry all our inadequate and superficial realizations of His truth into His presence, that, from Him, we may gain

deeper knowledge, a firmer faith, and a more joyous certitude in His inexhaustible lessons. In every article and item of the Christian faith there is a transcendent element which surpasses our present comprehension. Let us be confident that the light will break; and let us welcome the new illumination when it comes, sure that it comes from God. Be not puffed up with the conceit that you know all. Be sure of this, that, according to the good old metaphor, we are but as children on the shore of the great ocean, gathering a few of the shells that it has washed to our feet, itself stretching boundless, and, thank God! sunlit before us. "Ye know the way." "Master! we know not the way."

II.—Observe here, in the second place, our Lord's great self-revelation which meets this unconscious knowledge.

"Jesus saith unto Him: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Now it is quite plain, I think, from the whole strain of the context and the purpose of these words that the main idea in them is the first—"I am the Way." And that is made more certain because of the last words of the verse, which, summing up the force of the three preceding assertions, dwell only upon the metaphor of the Way; "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." So that of these three great words, the Way, the Truth, the Life, we are to regard the second and the third as explanatory of the first. They are not co-ordinate, but the first is the more general, and the other two show how the first comes to be true. "I am the Way" because "I am the Truth and the Life."

There are no words of the Master, perhaps, to which my previous remarks are more necessary to be applied than this. We know; and yet oh! what an overplus of glory and of depth is here that we do not know and never can know. The most fragmentary and inadequate grasp of them with heart and mind will bring light to the mind and quietness and peace to the heart; but the whole meaning of them goes beyond men and angels. We can only skim the surface and seek to shift back the boundaries of our knowledge a little further, and to embrace within its limits a little more of the broad land into which the words bring us. So just take a thought or two which may tend in that direction.

Note, then, as belonging to all three of these clauses that remarkable "*I am.*" We show a way, Christ *is* it. We speak truth, Christ *is* it. Parents impart life, which they have received, Christ *is* Life. He separates Himself from all men by that representation that He is not merely the communicator or the teacher or the guide, but that He Himself is, in His own personal Being, Way, Truth, Life. He said that, when Calvary was within arm's length. What did He think about Himself, and what should we think of Him?

And then note, further, that He here sets forth His unique relation to the truth as being one ground on which He is the Way to God. He *is* the Truth in reference to the Divine nature. That Truth, then, is not a mere matter of words. It is not only His speech that teaches us, but Himself that shows us God. His whole life and character, His personality, is the true representation within human conditions of the

Invisible God; and when He says, "I am the Way and the Truth," He is saying substantially the same thing as the great prologue of this Gospel says when it calls Him the Word and the Light of men, and as Paul says when he names Him "the Image of the Invisible God." There is all the difference between talking about God and showing Him. Men reveal God by their words; Christ reveals Him by Himself and the facts of His life. The truest and highest representation of the Divine nature that men can ever have is in the face of Jesus Christ.

I need only remind you in a sentence about other and lower applications of this great saying, which do not, as I think, enter into the purpose of the context. He is the Truth, inasmuch as, in the life and historical manifestation of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures, men find foundation truths of a moral and spiritual sort. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, He is these. And all true ethics is but the formulating into principles of the facts of the life and character of Jesus Christ.

Further, my text says He is the Way because He is the Life. On the one side God is brought to all hearts, and in some real sense to our comprehension, by the life of Jesus Christ, and so He is the Way. But that is not enough. There must be an action upon us as well as an action having reference to the Divine nature. God is brought to men by the manifestation in Christ; and we, the dead, are quickened by the communication of the Life. The one phrase points to all His work as a Revealer, the other points to all His work upon us as life-giving

Spirit, a Quickener and an Inspirer. Dead men cannot walk a road. It is no use making a path if it starts from a cemetery. Christ taught that men apart from Him are dead, and that the only life that they can have by which they can be knit to God is the Divine life which was in Himself, and of which He is the source and the principle for the whole world. He does not tell us here what yet is true, and what He abundantly tells in other parts of this great conversation, that the only way, by which the life which He brings can be diffused and communicated, is by His death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." He is the Life, and—paradox of mystery and yet fact which is the very heart and centre of His Gospel—His only way of giving His life to us is by giving up His physical life for us. He must die that He may be the life-spring for the world. The alabaster box must be broken if the ointment and its fragrance are to be poured out; and "death is the gate of life" in a deeper than the ordinary sense of the saying, inasmuch as the death of the Life which is Christ is the life of the death which we are.

And so, because, on the one hand, He brings a God to our hearts that we can love and trust, and because, on the other, He communicates to our spirits, dead in the only true death which is the separation from God by sin, the life by which we are knit to God, He is the way to the Father.

And what about people that never heard of Him, to whom that Way has been closed, to whom that Truth has never been manifested, to whom that Life has never been brought? Ah! Christ has other ways of

working than through His historical manifestation, for there is no truth more plainly taught in this great fourth Gospel than this, that "that Light lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The eternal Word works through all the earth, in ways beyond our ken, and wherever any man has, however imperfectly, felt after and grasped the thought of a Father in the heavens, there the Word, which is the light of men, has wrought.

But for us to whom this Book has come, for what people call in bitter irony "Christendom," the law of my text rigidly applies. And it is being worked out all round us to-day. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." And here we are, in this England of ours, and our sister nations on the Continent of Europe and in America, face to face as I believe with this alternative—either Jesus Christ the Revealer of God and the Life of men, or an empty Heaven. And for you, individually, it is either—take Christ for the Way, or wander in the wilderness and forget your Father. It is either—take Christ for the Truth, or be given over to the insufficiencies of mere natural, political, and intellectual truths, and the shows and illusions of time and sense. It is either—take Christ for your Life, or remain in your deadness, separate from God.

III.—Lastly, we have here the disciples' ignorance and the new vision which dispels it.

"If ye had known Me ye should have known My Father also, and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him." Our Lord accepts for the moment Thomas' standpoint. He supplements His former allegation of their knowledge with the admission of

the ignorance which went with it as its shadow, and was only too sadly and plainly shown by their failure to discern in Him the manifestation of the Father. He has just told them that they did know what they thought they knew not; He now tells them that they did not know what they thought they knew so well, after so many years of companionship—even Himself. The proof that they did not is that they did not know the Father as revealed in Him, nor Him as revealing the Father. If they missed that, they missed everything; and, for all they had known of His graciousness, were strangers to His truest self. Their ignorance would turn out knowledge, if they would think, and their supposed knowledge would turn out ignorance.

The lesson for us is that the true test of the completeness and worth of our knowledge of Christ lies in its being knowledge of God the Father, brought near to us by Him. This saying puts a finger on the radical deficiency of all merely humanitarian views of Christ's person, however clearly they may see and admiringly extol the beauty of His character and the "sweet reasonableness" of His wisdom. They all break down here, and are arraigned as so shallow and incomplete that they do not deserve to be called knowledge of Him at all. If you know anything about Jesus Christ rightly, this is what you know about Him, that in Him you see God. If you have not seen God in Him, you have not got to the heart of the mystery. The knowledge of Christ which stops with the man and the martyr, and the teacher and the beautiful, gentle brother, is knowledge so partial that even He cannot venture

to call it other than ignorance. Oh ! brethren, do our conceptions of Him meet this test which He Himself has laid down, and can we say that, seeing Him, we see in Him God ?

And then our Lord passes on to another thought, the new vision which at the moment was being granted to this unconscious ignorance that was passing into conscious knowledge. "From henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him." We must give that "from henceforth," as a note of time, a somewhat liberal interpretation, and apply it to the whole series of utterances and deeds of which the words of our text are but a portion. And, if so, we come to this. It was in the wisdom, and the gentleness, and the deep truths of that upper chamber ; it was in the agony and submission of Gethsemane ; it was in the meek patience before the judges, and the silent acceptance of ignominy and shame ; it was in the willing, loving endurance of the long hours upon the cross, that Christ inaugurated the new stage in His revelation of God and in His life-giving to the world. And it is from henceforth and thereby that in the man Jesus, men know and see "the Father" as they never did before. The cross and the passion of Christ are the unveiling to the world of the heart of God ; and by the side of that new vision the fairest and the loftiest and the sweetest of Christ's former manifestations and utterances sink into comparative insignificance. It is the dying Christ that reveals the living God.

So, dear friends, He is your way to God. See that you seek the Father by Him alone. He is your Truth ; grapple Him to your hearts, and by patient

meditation and continual faithfulness enrich yourselves with all the communicated treasures that you have already received in Him. He is your Life; cleave to Him, that the quick spirit that was in Him may pass into you and make you victors over all deaths, temporal and eternal. Know Him as a Friend, not as a mere historical person, or with mere head-knowledge, for to know a friend is something far deeper than to know a truth. Acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace. "This is life eternal, to know," with the knowledge which is life and possession, "Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."



V.

The True Vision of the Father.

“ Philip saith unto Jesus, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto Him, Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very work's sake.”—JOHN xiv. 8—11.



THE vehement burst with which Philip interrupts the calm flow of our Lord's discourse is not the product of mere frivolity or curiosity. One hears the ring of earnestness in it, and the yearnings of many years find voice. Philip had felt out of his depth, no doubt, in the profound teachings which our Lord had been giving, but His last words about seeing God set a familiar chord vibrating. As an Old Testament believer he knew that Moses had once led the elders of Israel up to the mount where “they saw the God of Israel,” and that to many others had been granted sensible manifestations of the Divine presence. As a disciple he longed for some

similar sign to confirm his faith. As a man he was conscious of the deep need which all of us have, whether we are conscious of it or not, for something more real and tangible than an unseeable and unknowable God. The peculiarities of Philip's temperament strengthened the desire. The first appearance that he makes in the gospels is characteristically like this his last. To all Nathaniel's objections he had only the reply, "Come and see." And here he says: "Oh! if we could *see* the Father it would be enough." He was one of the men to whom seeing is believing, and so he speaks. X

His petition is childlike in its simplicity, beautiful in its trust, noble and true in its estimate of what men need. He longs to see God. He believes that Christ can show God; he is sure that the sight of God will satisfy the heart. These are errors, or truths, according to what is meant by "seeing." Philip meant a palpable manifestation, and so far he was wrong. Give the word its highest and its truest meaning, and Philip's error becomes grand truth. Our Lord gently, lovingly, and with only a hint of rebuke, answers the request, and seeks to disengage the error from the truth. His answer lies in the versés that we have read. Let us try to follow them, and, as we may, to skim their surface, for their depths are beyond us. +

I.—First of all, then, we have the sight of God in Christ as enough to answer men's longings. There is a world of sadness and tenderness, of suppressed pain and of grieved affection, in the first words of our Lord's reply. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" He

seldom names His disciples. When He does, there is a deep cadence of affection in the designation. This man was one of the first disciples, the little original band called by Christ Himself, and thus had been with Him all the time of His ministry, and the Master wonders with a gentle wonder, that, before eyes that loved Him as much as Philip's did, His continual self-revelation had passed to so little purpose. In the answer, in its first portion, there lies the reiteration of the thoughts that I was trying to dwell upon in the last sermon, which, therefore, I may lightly touch now—viz., that the sight of Christ is the sight of God—"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"—and that not to know Christ as thus showing God is not to know Him at all—"Thou hast not known Me," Philip." Further, there is the thought that the sight of God in Christ is sufficient, "How sayest thou, Show us the Father?" From all this we may gather some thoughts on which I lightly touch.

I. The first is, that we all do need to have God made visible to us.

The history of heathendom shows us that. In every land men have said, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." And the highest cultivation of this highly cultivated and self-conscious nineteenth century has not removed men from the same necessity that the rudest savage has, to have some kind of manifestation of the Divine nature other than the dim and vague ones which are possible apart from the revelation of God in Christ. A God who is only the product of inferences from creation, or providence, or the mysteries of history, or the wonders of my own inner life, the creature of logic or of reflection, is very

powerless to sway and influence men. The limitations of our faculties and the boundlessness of our hearts both cry out for a God Who is nearer to us than that, and Whom we can see and love and be sure of. The whole world wants the making visible of Divinity as its deepest want. And *your* heart and mind require it. Nothing else will ever stay our hunger, will ever answer our questioning minds.

Christ meets this need. How can you make wisdom visible? How can a man see love or purity? How do I see your spirit? By the deeds of your body. And the only way by which God can ever come near enough to men to be a constant power and a constant smile in their lives is by their seeing Him at work in a Man, who amongst them is His image and revelation. Christ's whole life is the making visible of the invisible God. He is the manifestation to the world of the unseen Father.

That vision is enough—enough for mind, enough for heart, enough for will. There is none else that is sufficient, but this is. “How sayest thou, Show us the Father?” If we can see God it suffices us. Then the mind settles down upon the thought of Him as the basis of all being, and of all change; and the heart can twine itself round Him, and the seeking soul folds its wings and is at rest; and the troubled spirit is quiet, and the accusing conscience is silent, and the rebellious will is subdued, and the stormy passions are quieted; and in the inner kingdom is a great peace. The sight of God in Christ brings rest to every heart. And, oh! the absence of the vision is the true secret of all disquiet. We are troubled and careful, and tossed from one stormy billow to another,

and swept over by all the winds that blow, because we see not God, our Father, in the face of Jesus. "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us," is either a puerile petition, or the deepest and noblest prayer of the human heart. Blessed are they who have learned what it is to see, and know where that great sight is to be seen.

Our present knowledge and vision are far higher than that mere external symbol of a presence which this man wanted. The elders of Israel saw the God of Israel, but what they saw was but some symbolical manifestation of that which in itself is unseen and unattainable. But we who see God in Christ see no symbol but the Reality, and have nothing more, possible or to be hoped for here. Our present manifestation and sight of God in Christ does fall, in some ways unknown to us, beneath the bright hopes that we are entitled to cherish. But howsoever imperfect it may be, as measured against the perfection of the vision when we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known, it is enough, and more than enough, for all the questionings and desires of our hungering spirits.

II.—Our Lord goes on to a further answer, and points to the Divine and mutual indwelling by which this sight is made possible.

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." There are here, mainly, two things, Christ's claim to the oneness of unbroken communion, and Christ's claim, consequently, to the oneness of complete co-operation. "I am in the Father,"

indicates the suppression of all independent and therefore rebellious will, consciousness, thought and action; "And the Father in Me," indicates the influx into that perfectly filial manhood of the whole fulness of God in unbroken, continuous, gentle, deep flow. These are the two sides of this great mystery on which neither wisdom nor reverence lead us to dilate; and they combine to express the closest and most uninterrupted blending, interpenetration, and communion.

And then follows the other claim, that because of this continuous mutual indwelling there is perfect co-operation. This is also stated in terms corresponding to the preceding double representation. "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself," corresponds to, "I am in the Father." "The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works," corresponds to, "The Father in Me." The two put together teach us this, that by reason of that mysterious and ineffable union of communion, Jesus Christ in all His words and in all His works is the perfect instrument of the Divine will, so that His words are God's words, and His works are God's works; so that, when He speaks, His gentle wisdom, His loving sympathy, His melting tenderness, His authoritative commands, His prophetic threatenings, are the speech of God, and that when He acts, whether it be by miracle or in the ordinary deeds of His life, what we see is God working before our eyes as we never see Him in any human being.

And from all this follow just two or three considerations which I name. Note the absolute absence of any consciousness on Christ's part of the smallest deflection or disharmony between Himself and the Father. Two

triangles laid on each other are in every line, point, and angle absolutely coincident. That humanity is capable of receiving the whole inflow of God, and that indwelling God is perfectly expressed in the humanity. There is no trace of a consciousness of sin. Everything that Jesus Christ said He knew to be God's speaking; everything that He did He knew to be God's acting. There were no barriers between the two. Jesus Christ was conscious of no film of separation—not the thinnest film of air between these two who adhered and inhered so closely and so continuously. It is an awful assertion.

Now I pray you to ask yourselves the question: If this was what Christ said, what did He think of Himself? And is this a Man, like the rest of us, with blotches and sins, with failures to embody His own ideas, and still more to carry out in life the will that He knows to be God's will? Is this a Man like other men who thus speaks to us? If Jesus had this consciousness, either He was ludicrously, tragically, blasphemously, utterly mistaken and untrustworthy, or He is what the Church in all ages has confessed Him to be, "the Everlasting Son of the Father."

III.—Lastly, our Lord further sets before us the faith to which He invites us on the ground of His union with, and revelation of, God.

"Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the very works' sake." Observe that the verb at the beginning of this last verse of our text passes into a plural form. Our Lord has done with Philip especially, and speaks now to all who hear Him, and to us amongst the rest of His auditors. He bids us *believe* Him, and believe

something about Him on the strength of His own testimony, or, in default of that, and as second best, believe Him on the testimony of His works. I gather together what I have to say about this point into three remarks.

The true bond of union between men and Jesus Christ is faith. We have to trust, and that is better than sight. We have to trust *Him*. He is the personal Object of our faith. In all faith there is what I may call a moral and a voluntary element. A man believes a proposition because it is forced upon him, and his intelligence is obliged to accept it. A man trusts Christ because he *will* trust Him, and the moral and voluntary element carries us far beyond the mere intellectual conception of faith as the assent to a set of theological propositions. Faith really is the outgoing of the whole man—heart, will, intellect, and all—to a person whom it grasps. But the Christ that you and I have to trust is the Christ as He Himself has Himself declared to us. “Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.” There is a bastard, mutilated kind of thing that calls itself Christian faith, that goes about the world in this generation, which believes in Jesus Christ in all sorts of beautiful ways, but it will not believe in Him as the personal revelation and making visible of the unseen God. Jesus Christ Himself tells us here that that is not the kind of faith that He invites us to put forth. If we put forth that only, we have not yet come to understand Him. Oh, dear friends! Christ as here declared to us by Himself is the only Christ to whom it is right to give our trust. If He be not God manifest in the flesh, I ought not to trust Him.

I may admire Him as a historical personage; I may reverence Him for His wisdom and beauty; I may even in some vague way have a kind of love to Him. But what in the name of common sense shall I trust Him for? And why should He call upon me to exercise faith in Him unless He stand before me as the adequate object of a man's trust—namely, the manifest God?

And then, further, note that believing in the sense of trusting is seeing and knowing. Philip said, "Show us the Father." Christ answers, "Believe, and thou dost see." If you look back upon the previous verses of this chapter, you will find that in the earlier portion of them the key-word is "know"; that in the second portion of them the key-word is "see"; that in this portion of them the key-word is "believe." The world says, "Ah! seeing is believing." The Gospel says, "Believing is seeing." The true way to knowledge, and to a better vision than the uncertain vision of the eye, is faith. In certitude and in directness, the knowledge of God that we have through faith in the Christ whom our eyes have never seen is far ahead of the certitude and the directness that attach to our mere bodily sight. And so the key to all Divine knowledge and the sure road to the truest vision of God, is faith.

Further, faith, even if based upon lower than the highest grounds, is still faith, and acceptable to Him: "Or else believe Me for the very works' sake." The "works" are mainly, I suppose, though not exclusively, His miracles. And if so, we are here taught that, if a man has not come to that point of spiritual susceptibility in which the image of Jesus Christ lays

hold upon his heart and obliges him to trust Him and to love Him, there are yet the miracles to look at; and the faith that grasps them, and by help of that ladder climbs to Him, though it be second best, is yet real. The evidence of miracles is subordinate and yet it is valid and true. So our Lord contradicts both the exaggerations of past generations and the exaggerations of this, and neither asserts that the great reason for faith is miracles, nor that miracles are of no use at all. Former centuries in the Christian Church reiterated the former exaggeration, and thus partly provoked the exaggeration of this day. Let us keep the middle course: there is a better way of coming to Christ than through the gate of miracles, and that is that He should stamp His own Divine sweetness and elevation upon our minds and hearts. But if we have not reached that point, do not let us kick away the ladder that may help us to it. "Believe Him for the very works' sake." Imperfect faith may be the highway to perfection. Let us follow the light, if it be but a far-off glimmer, sure that it will bring us into perfect day if we be faithful to its leading.

On the other hand, dear friends, let us remember that no faith avails itself of all the treasures laid up for it, which does not lay hold upon Christ in the character in which He presents Himself. The only adequate, worthy trust in Him is the trust which grasps Him as the Incarnate God and Saviour. Only such a faith does justice to His own claim. Only such a faith is the sure path to vision and to knowledge. Only such a faith draws down the blessing of a questioning intellect answered, a hungry heart satisfied, a

conscience, accusing and prophetic of a judgment to come, cleansed and purified.

To each of us Christ addresses His merciful invitation, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me." May we all answer, "We believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"! /



VI.

The Works of the Ascended Christ.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.”—JOHN xiv. 12—14.



HAVE already pointed out in a previous sermon that the key-word of this context is “Believe !” In three successive verses we find it, each time widening in its application. We have first the question to the single disciple : “Philip ! believest thou not ?” We have then the invitation addressed to the whole group : “Believe Me !” And here we have a wholly general expression referring to all who, in every generation and corner of the world, put their trust in Christ, and extending the sunshine of this great promise to whosoever believeth in Him. Our Lord has pointed to *believing* as the great antidote to a troubled heart, as the sure way of knowing the Father, as the better substitute for sight ; and now here He opens before us still more wonderful prerogatives and effects of faith. His words carry us up into lofty and misty regions, where we can neither

breathe freely nor see clearly, except as we hold to His words. Therefore He prefaces them with His "Verily, verily!" bidding us listen to them with sharpened attention as the disclosure of something wonderful, and receive them with unfaltering confidence, on His authority, however marvellous and otherwise undiscoverable they may be.

What is it, then, that He thus commends to our acceptance? If I may venture a paraphrase which may at least have the advantage of being cast into less familiar words, it is just this, that because of, and after, Christ's departure from earth, He will, in response to prayer, work upon faithful souls in such a fashion as that they will do what He did, and in some sense will do even more.

I.—We have here the continuous work of the exalted Lord for and through His servants.

These disciples, of course, were trembling and oppressed with the thought that the departure of Jesus would be the end of His ceaseless activity for them, on which they had depended implicitly for so long. Henceforward, whatever distress or need might come, that voice would be silent, and that hand motionless, and they would be left to face every storm, unaccompanied and uncounselled. Some of us know how dreary such experience makes life, and we can understand how these men shrank from the prospect. Christ's words give strength to meet that trial, and not only tell them that after He is gone they will be able to do what they cannot do now, and what He used to do for them, but that *in* them He will work as well as *for* them, and be the power of their action, after He has departed.

For, notice the remarkable connection of the words with which we are dealing. "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall *he* do," and the ground of that is "because I go to My Father," and whatsoever the believer "shall ask, *I* will do."

So, then, there are here two very distinct paths on which Christ represents to us that His future activity will travel; the one, that of doing for us, in response to our prayers; the other, that of working on us and in us, so that our acts are His and His acts are ours. We may look at these two for a moment separately.

Here, then, there is clearly stated this great thought, that Christ's removal from the world is not the end of His activity in the world and on material things, but that, absent, He still is a present power, and, having passed through death, and been removed from sense, He can still operate upon the things round us, and move these according to His will. We are not to water down such words as these into any such thought as that the continuous influence of the memory and history of His past will be a present power in all ages.

That is true, gloriously and uniquely true, but that is not the truth which He speaks here. Over and above that perpetual influence of past recorded work, there is the present influence of His present work, and to-day He is working as truly as He wrought when on earth. One form of His work was finished on Calvary, as His dying breath proclaimed; but there is another work of Christ in the midst of the ages, moving the pawns on the chess-board of the world, and presiding over the fortunes of the solemn game, which will not be ended until that day when

the angel voices shall chant "It is done. The kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ." The living Christ works by a true forth-putting of His own present power upon material things, and amidst the providences of life. And therefore these disciples were not to be cast down as if His work for them were ended.

Now it is clear, of course, that such words as these do demand for their vindication something perfectly unique and solitary in the nature and person of Jesus Christ. All other men's work is cut in twain by death. "This man, having served his generation by the will of God, was gathered to his fathers. And he (and his work) saw corruption." That is the epitaph over the greatest thinkers, statesmen, heroes, poets, the epitaph for the tenderest and most hopeful. Father, mother, husband, wife, child, friend, all cease to act when they die. And though thunders should break, they are silent and can help no more. But Christ is living to-day, and working all around us.

Now, brethren, it is of the last importance for the joyousness of our Christian lives, and for the courage of our conflict with sorrow and sin, that we should give a very prominent place in our creeds, and our hearts, to this great truth of a living Christ. What a joyful sense of companionship it brings to the solitary, what calmness of vision in contemplating the complications and calamities of the world's history, if we grasp firmly the assurance that the living Christ is actually working by the present forth-putting of His power in the world to-day!

But that is not all. There is another path on which our Lord shows us here a glimpse of His working.

Not only for us, but on and in and therefore through us, so that the deeds that we do in faith that rests upon Him are in one aspect His, and in another ours.

“The works that I do shall He do also ;” because “whatsoever ye shall ask I will do it.”

We have not to think only of a Lord whose activity for us, beneficent and marvellous as it is, was finished in the misty past upon the Cross, nor have we only to think of a Lord whose activity for us, mighty and comforting as it is to all the solitary and the struggling, is wrought as from the heights of the heavens, but we have to think of One who is beside us and in us, and knows the hidden paths that no eye sees, and no foot but His can tread, into the inmost recesses of our souls, and there can enter as king and righteousness, as life and strength. This is the deepest of the lessons that He would teach us here. “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me,” and through Me, if I keep close to Him, will work mightily in forms that My poor manhood could never have reached. That emblem of the vine and the branches, and the other emblem of the house and its inhabitants, and the other of the head and the members, all point to this one same thing which shallow and unspiritual men call “mystical,” but which is the very heart of the Christian prerogative and the anchor of the Christian hope. Christ in us is our present righteousness and our hope of a future glory.

And now, mark that a still more solemn and mysterious aspect of this union of Jesus Christ and the believer is given, since it is set forth as resulting in our doing Christ’s works, and Christ doing ours ; and therein is paralleled with the yet more wonderful

and ineffable union between the Father and the Son. It is no accident that in one clause He says, "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works;" and that in the next He says, "The works that I do shall he do also"; and so bids us see in that union between the Father and the Son, and in that consequent union of co-operation between Him and His Father, a pattern after which our union with Him is to be moulded, both as regards the closeness of its intimacy and as regards the resulting manifestations in life. Christ is in us and we in Christ in some fashion as the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son. And the works that we do He does in some fashion that faintly echoes and shadows the perfect co-operation of the Father and the Son in the works that the Christ did upon the earth.

All the doings of a Christian man, if done in faith, and holding by Christ, are Christ's doings, inasmuch as He is the life and the power which does them all. And Christ's deeds are reproduced and perpetuated in His humble follower, inasmuch as the life which is imparted will unfold itself according to its own kind; and he that loves Christ will be changed into His likeness, and become a partaker of His Spirit. So let us curb all self-dependence and self-will, that that mighty tide may flow into us; and let us cast from us all timidity, distrust, and gloom, and be strong in the assurance that we have a Christ living in the heavens to work for us, and living within us to work through us.

There is no record of the Ascension in John's

Gospel, but these words of my text unveil to us the inmost meaning of that Ascension, and are in full accord with the great picture which one of the Evangelists has drawn—a picture in two halves, which yet are knit together into one. “So then, after He had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God; and they went forth and preached everywhere.” What a contrast between the two—the repose above, the toil below! Yes! But the next words knit them together—“The Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.”

II.—Note, in the next place, the greater work of the servants on and for whom the Lord works. “Greater works than these shall he do.”

Is, then, the servant greater than his Lord? and he that is sent greater than He that sent him? Not so, for whatsoever the servant does is done because the Lord is with and in him. And the contrast that is drawn between the works that Christ does on earth and the greater works that the servant is to do hereafter is, properly and at bottom, the contrast between Christ’s manifestations in the time of His earthly limitation and humiliation, and His manifestations in the time of His ascension and celestial glory.

We need not be afraid that such great words as these in any measure trench on the unique and unapproachable character of the earthly work of Christ in its two aspects, which are one—of Revelation and Redemption. These are finished, and need no copy, no repetition, no perpetuation, until the end of time. But the work of objective Revelation, which was completed when He ascended, and the work of Redemption,

which was finished when He rose—these require to be applied through the ages. And it is in regard to the application of the finished work of Christ to the actual accomplishment of its contemplated consequences, that the comparison is drawn between the limited sphere and the small results of Christ's work upon earth, and the world-wide sweep and majestic magnitude of the results of the application of that work by His servants' witnessing work. The wider and more complete spiritual results achieved by the ministration of the servants than by the ministration of the Lord is the point of comparison here. And I need only remind you that the poorest Christian who can go to a brother soul, and by word or life can draw that soul to a Christ whom it apprehends as dying for its sins and raised for its glorifying, does a mightier thing than it was possible for the Master to do by life or lip whilst He was here upon earth. For the Redemption had to be completed in act before it could be proclaimed in word; and Christ had no such weapon in His hands with which to draw men's souls, and cast down the high places of evil, as we have when we can say, "We testify unto you that the Son of God hath died for our sins, and is raised again according to the Scriptures." Nor need I do more than remind you of the comparison, so exalting for His humility and so humbling for our self-exaltation, between the narrow sphere in which His earthly ministrations had to operate and the world-wide scope which is given to His servants. "He laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them;" and at the end of His life there were one hundred and twenty disciples in Jerusalem, and five hundred in Galilee, and you might

have put them all into this chapel and had ample room to spare. That was all that Jesus Christ had done; while to-day and now the world is being leavened, and the kingdoms of the earth are beginning to recognize His name. "Greater works than these shall he do" who lets Christ in him do all his works.

III.—Lastly, notice the conditions on which the exalted Lord works for and on His servants.

These are two, faith and prayer.

"He that believeth on Me the works that I do shall he do also." Faith, the simple act of loving trust in Jesus Christ, opens the door of our hearts and natures for the entrance of all His solemn Omnipotence, and makes us possessors of it. It is the condition, and the only condition, and plainly the indispensable condition, of possessing this Divine Christ's power, that we should trust ourselves to Him that gives it. And if we do, then we shall not trust in vain, but to us there will come power that will surpass our desire, and fill us with its own rejoicing and pure energy. Faith will make us like Christ. Faith is intensely practical. "He that believeth shall *do*." It is no mere cold assent to a creed which is utterly impotent to operate upon men's acts, no mere hysterical emotion which is utterly impotent to energize into nobilities of service and miracles of consecration, but it is the affiancing of the whole nature, which spreads itself before Him and prays, "Fill my emptiness and vitalize me with Thine own Spirit." That is the faith which is ever answered by the inrush of the Divine power, and the measure of our capacity of receiving is the measure of His gift to us.

So if Christian individuals and Christian communi-

ties are impotent, or all but impotent, there is no difficulty in understanding why. They have cut the connection, they have shut the tap. They lack faith; and so their power is weakness. "Why could we not cast him out," said they, perplexed when they had no need to be. "Why could you not cast him out? Because you do not believe that I, working in you, can cast him out. That is why; and the only why." Let us learn that the secret of the Christian's weakness is the weakness of their Christian faith.

And the other condition is prayer. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name I will do it," and He repeats it, for confirmation and for greater emphasis. "If ye shall ask anything in My name," or, as perhaps that clause ought to be read with some versions, "If ye shall ask *Me* anything in My name I will do it."

Three points may be named here. Our power depends upon our prayer. God's and Christ's fulness and willingness to communicate do *not* depend upon our prayer. But our capacity to receive of that fulness, and so the possibility of its communication to us, do depend upon our prayer. "We have not because we ask not."

The power of our prayer depends upon our conscious oneness with the revealed Christ. "If ye shall ask in My name," says He. And people think they have fulfilled the condition when, in a mechanical and external manner, they say, as a formula at the end of petitions that have been all stuffed full of self-will and selfishness, "For Christ's sake. Amen!" and then they wonder they do not get them answered! Is that asking in Christ's name?

Christ's name is the revelation of Christ's character

and to do a thing in the name of another person is to do it as His representative, and as realizing that in some deep and real sense—for the present purpose, at all events—we are one with Him. And it is when we know ourselves to be united to Christ and one with Him, and representative in a true fashion of Himself, as well as when, in humble reliance on His work for us and His loving heart, we draw near, that our prayer has power, as the old divines used to say, “to move the hand that moves the world,” and to bring down a rush of blessing upon our heads. Prayer in the name of Christ is hard to offer. It needs much discipline and watchfulness; it excludes all self-will and selfishness. And if, as my text tells us, the end of the Son’s working is the glory of the Father, that same end, and not our own ease or comfort, must be the end and object of all prayer which is offered in His name. When we so pray we get an answer. And the reason why such multitudes of prayers never travel higher than the roof, and bring no blessings to him who prays, is because they are not prayers in Christ’s name.

Prayer in His name will pass into prayer to Him. As He not obscurely teaches us here, if we adopt the reading to which I have already referred, He has an ear to hear such requests, and He wields Divine power to answer. Surely it was not blasphemy nor any interruption of the worship due to God alone, when the dying martyr outside the city wall cried and said, “*Lord Jesus ! Receive my spirit.*” Nor is it any departure from the solemnest obligations laid upon us by the unity of the Divine nature, nor are we bringing idolatrous petitions to another than the Father

when we draw near to Christ and ask Him to give us that which He gives as the Father's gift, and to work on us that which the Father that dwelleth in Him works through Him for us.

Trust yourselves to Christ, and let your desires be still, to listen to His voice in you, and let that voice speak. And then, dear brethren, we shall be lifted above ourselves, and strength will flow into us, and we shall be able to say, "I can do all things, through the Christ that dwells in me and makes me strong." And just as the glad, sunny waters of the incoming tide fill the empty places of some oozy harbour, where all the ships are lying as if dead and the mud is festering in the sunshine, so into the slimy emptiness of our corrupt hearts there will pour the flashing sunlit wave, the ever-fresh rush of His power; and everything will live whithersoever it cometh, and we shall be able to say in all humility, and yet in glad recognition of Christ's faithfulness to this, His transcendent promise, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," "because the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."



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VII.

Love and Obedience.

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."—JOHN xiv. 15.



AS we have seen in former sermons, the keyword of the preceding context is "Believe!" and that word passes now into "Love." The order here is the order of experience. There is first the believing gaze upon the Christ as He is revealed—the image of the invisible God. That kindles love, and prompts to obedience.

There is another very beautiful and subtle link of connection between these words and the preceding. Our Lord has just been saying, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do." Is the parallel wholly accidental or fanciful between the Lord who does as the servant asks and the servant who is to do as the Lord commands? On both sides there is love delighting to be set in motion by a message from the other side. On the one part there is love supreme which commands and delights to be asked, on the other part there is love dependent, which asks and delights to be commanded; and though the gulf

between the two be great, and the difference between Christ's law and our petitions be infinite, yet there is an analogy.

I pause on these words, though they are introduced here only as the basis of the great promise which follows, because they open out into such wide fields. They contain the all-sufficient law of Christian conduct. They contain the one motive adequate to bring that law into realization. They disclose the very roots of Christian morality, and part of the secret of Christ's unique power and influence amongst men. They come with a message of encouragement to all souls despairing of being able to do that which they would, and of freedom to all men burdened with a crowd of minute and external regulations. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." There are three points to be dwelt upon here—namely, the all-sufficient ideal or guide of life, the all-powerful motive which Christ brings to bear, and the all-subduing gaze of faith by which that motive is brought into action.

I.—We have here the all-sufficient ideal or guide for life.

Jesus Christ is not speaking merely to that little handful of men in the upper chamber, but to all generations and to all lands, to the end of time and round the world. The authoritative tone which He assumes here is very noteworthy. He speaks as Jehovah spoke from Sinai, and quotes the very words of the old law when He speaks of "keeping My commandments." There are distinctly involved in this quite incidental utterance of Christ's two startling things—one the assumption of His right to impose His will upon every human being, and the other His

assumption that His will contains the all-sufficient directory for human conduct.

What, then, are His commandments? Those which He spoke are plain and simple; and people who wish to pick holes in the greatness of Christ's work in the world tell us that you can match almost all His precepts up and down amongst moralists and philosophers. And they crow very loud if, scratching amongst Rabbinical dust-heaps, they find something that looks like anything that He once said. Be it so! What does that matter? Christ's "commandments" are Christ Himself. This is the originality and uniqueness of Christ as a moral teacher, that He says, not "Do this, that, and the other thing," but "Copy Me." "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." His commandments are Himself; and the sum of them all is this—a character perfectly self-oblivious, and wholly penetrated and saturated with joyful, filial submission to the Father, and uttermost and entire giving Himself away to His brethren. That is Christ's commandment which He bids us keep, and His law is to be found in His life.

And then, if that be so, what a change passes on the aspect of law, when we take Christ as being our living embodiment of it! Everything that was hard, repellent, far-off, cold, vanishes. We have no longer tables of stone, but fleshy tables of a heart; and the Law stands before us, a Being to be loved, to be clung to, to be trusted to, and whom it is blessedness to know and perfection to be like. The rails upon which the train travels may be rigid, but they mean safety, and they carry men smoothly into otherwise inaccessible lands. So the life of Jesus Christ brought to us is

the firm and plain track along which we are to travel; and all that was difficult and hard in the cold thought of *duty* becomes changed into the attraction of a living pattern and example. This living and breathing and loving commandment is all-sufficient for every detail and complexity of human life. It is so by the confession of believers and of unbelievers, by the joyful confession of the one, and by the frank acknowledgment of many of the others. Listen to one of them. "Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left, a unique Figure, not more unlike all His predecessors than all His followers. . . . Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in selecting this Man as the ideal Representative and Guide of humanity; nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life."

It is enough for conduct, it is enough for character, it is enough in all perplexities of conflicting duties, that we listen to and obey the Voice that says, "Keep My commandments."

II.—Now note, secondly, the all-powerful motive.

Probably my text is best understood as the Revised Version understands it, which reads, "If ye love Me, *ye will* keep My commandments," making it an assurance and not an injunction. Christ speaks with the calm confidence that love to Him will have power enough to sway the life. His utterance here is not the addition of another commandment to the list, but rather the pointing out of how they may all be kept.

The principle that underlies these words, then, is this, that love is the foundation of obedience, and obedience is the sure outcome and result of love. That is true in regard of the lower forms of love, which may teach us something of the operation of the higher. We all know that love which is real, and not simply passion and selfishness with a mask on, delights most chiefly in knowing and conforming to the will of the beloved; and that there is nothing sweeter than to be commanded by the dear voice and to obey for dear love's sake. And you have only to take that which is the experience of every true heart, in a thousand sweet ways in daily life, and to lift it into the higher regions, and to transfer it to the bond that unites us with Jesus Christ, to see that He has invoked no illusory, but an omnipotent power, when He has rested the whole force of His transforming and sanctifying energy upon this one principle, "If ye love Me, the Lawgiver, ye will keep the commandments of My Law."

That is exactly what distinguishes and lifts the morality of the Gospel above all other systems. The worst man in the world knows a great deal more of his duty than the best man does. It is not for want of knowledge that men go to the devil, but it is for want of power to live their knowledge. And what morality fails to do, with its clearest utterances of human duty, Christ comes and does. The one is like the useless proclamations posted up in some rebellious district, where there is no army to back them, and the king's authority from whom they come is flouted. The other gets itself obeyed. Such is the difference between the powerless morality of the world and the

commandment of Jesus Christ. Here is the road plain and straight. What matters that, if there is no force to draw the cart along it? There might as well be no road at all. Here stand all your looms, polished and in perfect order, but there is no steam in the boilers; and so there is no motion, and nothing woven. What we want is not law, but power. And what the Gospel gives us, and stands alone in giving us, is not merely the knowledge of the will of God, and the clear revelation of what we ought to be, but it is the power to become it.

Love does that, and love alone. That strong force brought into action in our hearts will drive out from thence all rivals, all false and low things. The true way to cleanse the Augean stables, as the old myth has it, was to turn the river into them. It would have been endless work to wheel out the filth in wheelbarrows loaded by spades: turn the stream in, and it will sweep away all the foulness. When the Ark comes into the Temple, Dagon lies, a mutilated stump, upon the threshold. When Christ comes into my heart, then all the obscene and twilight-loving shapes that lurked there, and defiled it, will vanish like ghosts at cock-crowing before His calm and pure presence. He, and He alone, entering my heart by the portals of my love, will coerce my evil and stimulate my good. And if I love Him, I shall keep His commandments.

Now, brethren, here is a plain test and a double-barrelled one, which tries both our love and our obedience with a sharp touchstone. "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments." That implies, first, that there is no love worth calling so which does not

keep the commandment. All the emotional and the mystic, and the so-called higher parts of Christian experience, have to be content to submit to this plain test—do they help us to live as Christ would have us, and that because He would have us? Love to Him that does not keep His commandments is either spurious or dangerously feeble. The true sign of its presence in the heart and the noblest of its operations is not to be found in high-pitched expressions of fervid emotion, nor even in the sacred joys of solitary communion, but in its making us, while in the rough struggle of daily life, and surrounded by trivial tasks, live near Him, and by Him, and for Him, and like Him. If I live so, I love Him; if not, not. Not that I mean to say, that in regard of each individual action of a Christian man's life there must be the conscious presence of reference to the supreme love, but that each individual action of the life ought to come from a character of which that reference to the supreme love is the very formative principle and foundation. The colouring matter put in at the fountain will dye every drop of the stream; and they whose inmost hearts are tinged and tintured with the sweet love of Jesus Christ, from their hearts will go forth issues of life all coloured and moulded thereby. Test your Christian love by your practical obedience.

And, on the other hand, there is no obedience worth calling so which is not the child of love; and all the multitude of right things which Christians do without that motive are made short work of by the principle. Obedience which is formal, mechanical, matter-of-course, without the presence in it of a loving submission of the will; obedience which is reluctant,

calculated, forced upon us by dread, imitated from others—all that is nothing; and Jesus Christ does not count it as obedience at all. This is a sieve with very small meshes, and there will be a great deal of rubbish left in it after the shaking. “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” The “keeping of My commandments” which has not “love to Me” underlying it is no keeping at all.

III.—And so, lastly, notice the all-subduing gaze.

That is not included in my text, but it is necessary in order to complete the view of the forces to which Jesus Christ here entrusts the hallowing of life, and the sanctifying of our nature; and we are led to refer to it by what I have already pointed out; the connection between the “love” of my text and the “believe” of the preceding verses. I can fancy a man saying, “Keep His commandments? Woe is me! How am I to keep?” The answer is “Love.” And I can fancy him saying “Love?” Yes! “And how am I to love? I cannot get up love at the word of command, or by any voluntary effort.” And the answer comes again, “Believe!” Trust Christ, and you will love Him. Love Him and you will do His will. And then the question comes again, “Believe what?” And the answer comes, “Believe that He is the Son of God who died for you.”

Nothing else will kindle a man’s love than the faithful contemplation and grasp of Christ in that character and aspect. Only the redeeming Christ affords a reasonable ground for our love to Him. Here is a dead man, dead for nineteen centuries, expecting you and me to have towards Him a vivid personal affection which will influence our conduct

and our character. What right has He to expect that? There is only one reasonable ground upon which I may be called to love Jesus Christ, and that is that He died for me. And such a love towards such a Christ is the only thing which will wield power sufficient to guide, to coerce, to restrain, to constrain, and to sustain my weak, wayward, rebellious, and sluggish will. All other emotions of so-called admiration and worship and reverence and affection for Jesus Christ are apt to be tepid; but this one has power and warmth in it.

Here is a unique fact in the history of the world, that not only did He make this astounding claim upon all subsequent generations; but that the subsequent generations have responded to it, and that to-day there are millions of men who love Jesus Christ with a love warm, personal, deep, powerful—the spring of all their goodness and the Lord of their lives. Why do they? For one reason only. Because they believe that He died for them individually, and that He lives an ascended yet ever-present Helper and Lover of their souls.

My brethren, that conviction, and that conviction only, as I venture to affirm, has power to send a glow of love into the heart which shall move all the limbs in swift and happy obedience. That conviction, and that conviction alone, will melt the thick-ribbed ice of our spirits and will make it flow down in sweet waters. The love that has looked upon the Cross will be the fulfilling of the law of Him that speaks from the Throne. When our faith has grasped Him, as enduring all that for us, then our love will be awakened to hear and to do His commandments.

“We love Him because He first loved us,” and such love will flower and fruit in obedience. I shall keep His commandments when I love Him. I shall love Him with a love, that makes my will plastic and my life a glad service, when by faith I grasp Him as the Incarnate Lord, “who loved me and gave Himself for me.”



VIII.

The Praying Christ, the Giving Father, and the Abiding Spirit.

“And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”—JOHN xiv. 16, 17.



HE “and” at the beginning of these words shows us that they are continuous with and the consequence of what precedes. “If ye love Me, *ye* will keep My commandments, and *I* will pray . . . and *He* will send.” Such is the series; but we must also remember that, as we have seen in previous sermons, the obedience spoken of in the clause before my text is itself treated as a consequence of some preceding steps. The ladder that is fixed upon earth and has its summit in heaven has for its rungs, first and bottommost, “believe”; second, “love”; third, “obey.” And thus the context carries us from the very basis of the Christian life up into its highest reward, even the larger gift to an obedient spirit of that Great Spirit who is the Comforter and the Teacher.

And there is another very striking link of connection between these words and the preceding. There are, if I may so say, two telephones across the abyss that separates the ascended Christ and us. One of them is contained in His words, "If ye ask anything in My name I will do it"; the other is contained in these words, "If ye keep My commandments I will ask." Love on this side of the great cleft sets love on the other side of it in motion in a twofold fashion. If we ask, He does; if we do, He asks. His action is the answer to our prayers, and His prayers are the answer to our obedient action. So we have here these points—the praying Christ and the giving Father; the abiding Gift; the blind world and the recipient disciples.

I.—Note, then, first, the praying Christ and the giving Father. "I will ask and He will give" seems a strange drop from the lofty claims with which we have become familiar in the earlier verses of this chapter. "Believe in God, believe also in Me." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it." "Keep My commandments." All these distinctly express, or necessarily imply, Divine nature, prerogatives, and authority. But here the voice that spake the perfect revelation of God, and gave utterance authoritatively to the perfect law of life, softens and lowers its tones into petition; and Jesus Christ joins the rank of the suppliants. Now common sense tells us that apparently diverse views lying so close together in one continuous stream of speech cannot have seemed to the utterer of them to be contradictory; and I venture to affirm that there is no explanation which does justice to these two sides of Christ's consciousness—

the one all Divine and authoritative and lofty, and the other all lowly and identifying Himself with petitioners and suppliants everywhere—except the old-fashioned and to-day discredited belief that He is God manifest in the flesh, who prays in His Manhood and hears prayer in His Divinity. The bare humanistic view which emphasizes such utterances as these of my text does not, for the life of it, know what to do with the other ones, and cannot manage to unite these two images into a stereoscopic solid. That is reserved for the faith which believes in the Manhood and in the Deity of our Lord and Saviour.

His intercession is the great hope of the Christian heart. His intercession is the great activity of His present exalted and glorious state. His intercession is no mere verbal utterance, nor the representation to the Father of an alien or a diverse will, but His intercession, mysterious as it is, and unfathomable to our poor, short lines and light plummets, must mean this at all events—His continual activity in presenting before the Divine Father, as the motive and condition of His blessing being granted, His own great work upon the Cross. The High Priest passes within the veil, bearing in His hand the offering which He has made, and by reason of that offering, and of His powerful presence before the mercy-seat, all the spiritual gifts which redeem and regenerate and sanctify humanity are for ever coming forth. "I will pray, and He will give," is but one way of saying, "Seeing then, that we have a great High Priest over the House of God who is entered within the veil, let us draw near."

But I would have you notice how, as is always the

case in all utterances of Jesus Christ which express the lowest humiliation and completest identification of Himself with humanity, there is ever present some touch of obscured glory, some all but suppressed flash of brightness which will not be wholly concealed. Note two things in this great utterance; one, Christ's quiet assumption that all through the ages, and to-day, nineteen centuries after He died, He knows, at the moment of their being done, His servants' deeds. "Keep My commandments, and, knowing that you keep them, I will then and there pray for you." He claims in the lowly words an altogether supernatural, abnormal, Divine cognizance of all the acts of men down the ages and across the gulf between earth and heaven.

And the other signature of Divinity stamped on the prayer of Christ is His certitude of the answer. "I will ask and He will give." He puts, as it were, the Father's act in pledge to us, and assures us, in a tone of certainty, which is not merely the assurance of faith, but the certitude of One who is One with the Father, that His prayer brings ever its answer. "Father! I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me." How strange! How far beyond the warrantable language of man! And how impossible for a fisherman of Bethsaida to imagine, if he had not heard, that strange blending of submission and of authority which speaks in such words.

Then, remember what I have already said, that, according to the teaching of this verse, taken in connection with its context, that which put in motion Christ's intercessory activity, as represented in my text, is the obedience of a Christian man. If you

obey He will pray, and the Father will send. So the reward of imperfect obedience is the larger measure given to us of that Divine Spirit by whose indwelling, obedience becomes possible, and self-surrender a joy and a power. And that is not merely because of the natural operation by which any kind of conduct tends to repeat itself in more complete measure, nor is it merely a case of "to him that hath shall be given"; as a man's arm is strengthened by exercise, and any faculty becomes more assured, and swift, and at the command of its owner, by use. But there is a distinct supernatural impartation to every obedient heart, of Divine gifts which come straight through Jesus Christ to it. He Himself, in this immediate context, says, "If I depart I will send Him unto you." And the true conception is that in that Spirit's gift, which is a reality waiting as its crown and reward upon our poor stained obedience, the whole Godhead is present; the Father the Source; the Son the Channel; the Spirit the Gift.

II.—And so, secondly, note what our text tells us of that abiding gift.

"He will send another Comforter," "that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth." I suppose I may take it for granted that most of my audience know all that need to be said as to the meaning of this word "Comforter." In our present modern English it has a very much narrower range of meaning than its etymology would give it, and than probably it had when it was first used in an English translation. "Comforter" means a great deal more than "cōnsoler," though we have narrowed it to that signification almost exclusively. It means not only one who

administers sweet whispers of consolation in sorrow, but one who, in any circumstances, by his presence makes strong. And the original Greek word, of which it is the translation here, has precisely an analogous meaning; its original signification being that of one who is called to the aid of another, primarily as an advocate in a court of law, but more widely as a helper in any form whatsoever. And that is the idea which is to be attached to the word here:—a Comforter who makes strong by His presence; the Paraclete, who is our Advocate, Helper, Guide, and Instructor. Need I dwell upon the great thoughts that spring from that metaphor; how we have to look for a person, and not merely a vague influence; a Divine Person who will be by our sides on condition of our faith, love, and obedience, to be our Strength in all weakness, our Peace in all trouble, our Wisdom in all darkness, our Guide in every perplexity, our Comforter and Cherisher, our Righteousness when sin is strong, the Victor over our temptations, and the Companion and Sweetener of our solitude? The metaphors with which Scripture represents this great personal Influence are full of instruction and beauty. He comes as “the Fire,” which melts, which warms, which cleanses, which quickens. He comes as the “rushing, mighty Wind,” which bears health upon its wings, and sometimes breathes gently as an infant’s breath, and sometimes sweeps with irresistible power. He comes as the “Oil,” gently flowing, lubricating, making every joint supple, nourishing. He comes as the “Water of Life,” refreshing, vitalizing, quickening all growth. He comes fluttering down as the Dove of God, the bird of peace that will brood

upon our hearts. The predicates which Scripture attaches to that great Name are equally various, and are full of teaching as to the manner in which He is the Comforter and the Advocate. He is the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of Power, the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of a Sound Mind, the Spirit of Sonship, the Spirit of Supplication, and of many great things besides. And this sweet, strong, all-sufficient Person is offered to each of us, and waits to enter our hearts.

And says Christ, this Strengtheners and Advocate is to replace Me and to carry on My work. He "will send *another* Comforter." Who was the other but the Master who was speaking? So all that that handful of men found of sweetness and shelter and assured guidance, and stay for their weakness, and enlightenment for their darkness, and companionship for their solitude, and a breast on which to rest their heads, and love in which to bathe their hearts, all *these* this Divine Spirit will bring to each of us if we will.

And, further, our Lord tells us that this strong continuation of His presence will be a permanent companion. "He will abide with you for ever." He was comforting the disciples who were trembling at the thought of His departure, and knowing that all the sweetness of these three short years had come to an end; and He says to them, and through them to all the ages to the end of time: Here is the abiding Guest, that nothing but your own sin will ever cast out from your hearts.

And Christ tells us how this great Spirit will do His work. He is the "Spirit of Truth," not as if He brought new truth. To suppose that He does opens the

door to all manner of fanaticism, but the truth, the revelation of which is all summed and finished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, is the weapon by which the Divine Spirit works all His conquests, the staff on which He makes us lean and be strong. He is the Spirit by whom the truth passes into our personal possession, by no mere imperfect form of outward teaching which is always confused and insufficient, but by the inward teaching that deals with our hearts and our spirits.

But Christ speaks, too, of the blind world. There is a tone of deep sadness in His words. The thought of the immense multitude of men who were incapacitated to receive this strengthener steals across and casts a momentary shadow upon even the brightness and greatness of His promise. "The world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." The "world" is the mass of man, considered as godless and separate from Him. And there is a bit of the world in us all; but there are men who are wholly under its influence and dominion. And these men, says Christ, are perfectly incapable of receiving the teaching of this Divine Comforter. Of course there are other operations of that Great Spirit of which we shall have to hear as we go on further in this context, when His work convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. But what our Lord is speaking of here is the work of that Spirit who comes in response to His prayer, which rises in consequence of our obedience, and who, coming, brings with Him strength and purity and peace and wisdom; and that aspect of His operations a heart that is all full and seething with the world is unfit to receive. It cannot see Him

Embruted natures are altogether incapacitated for high thoughts, for the perception of natural beauty, for the appreciation of art; and worldly men, by the very same law, are incapable of receiving this Divine Spirit. A savage stares at the sunshine and sees nothing but a glare. And worldly men—that is to say, men whose tastes, inclinations, desires, hopes, purposes, strivings, are all bound by this visible diurnal round—lack the organ that enables them to see that Divine Spirit moving round about them. Whether you have put your eyes out by fleshly lusts, or, as many men in this generation have done, by intellectual self-sufficiency and conceit; if the world, in its grosser or in its more refined forms, is your master, you are stone blind to all the best realities of the universe, and you cannot see the things that are. If you look out upon the history of the Church, or upon the present condition of Christendom, and say, “I see no Divine Spirit working there;” well, then, the only thing that is to be said to you is, “Go to an oculist; your sight is bad. Perhaps there is solid land, as some of us see it, where you see only mist.” This generation wants the preaching of a supernatural power at work beside us and among us, and until we come to believe *that*, we do not understand the fulness of Christ’s gift.

III.—Then, lastly, note the recipient disciples.

Observe that the order of clauses is reversed in the last part of the text. The world cannot receive, because it does not know. The disciple knows, because he receives. Possession and knowledge reciprocally interchange places, and may be regarded as cause and effect of one another. That is to say, at

bottom they are one and the same thing. Knowledge is possession, and possession is the only knowledge. These disciples knew Christ in a fashion. He had just been telling them that they did not know Him; but so far as they did dimly grasp Him, they saw the Spirit—in another form, indeed, than they would hereafter see—but still truly, though imperfectly. Beholding that Spirit, though through a glass darkly, and cherishing their partial possession of Him, they will come to more, and steadfastly increase from the morning twilight to the mid-day glory. So He says: “He dwelleth with you now, and He shall be *in* you” hereafter.

There is a better form of possession opening before them, which came at Pentecost, and has lasted ever since. From thenceforward we have a Spirit that not only stands by our sides and holds fellowship with us (for the two “withs” of our text are two different words, expressing respectively proximity and communion), but who actually dwells in the central depths of our natures, and whom we thus possess more perfectly and blessedly than is possible to even the closest outward proximity, and the sweetest outward fellowship.

That possession of an abiding and indwelling Spirit is the gift of Christ to every Christian soul, and is to be found by us all upon that path so plainly marked out in our text and its connections: “believe,” “love,” “obey.” Then the Dove of God will flutter down upon our heads and nestle in our hearts, and, brooding over that solemn and solitary sea of our chaotic spirit, will bring up from it a new world glistening in fresh order and beauty, and very good in its Maker’s eyes.

IX.

The Absent Present Christ.

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also.”—JOHN xiv. 18, 19.



HE sweet and gracious comfortings with which Christ had been soothing the disciples' fears went very deep, but hitherto they had not gone deep enough. It was much that they should know the purpose of His going, whither He went, and that they had an interest in His departure. It was much that they should have before them the prospect of reunion; much that they should know that all through His absence He would be working in them, and that they should be assured that, absent, He would send them a great gift. But reunion, influence from afar, and gifts from the other side of the gulf were not all that their hearts needed. And so here our Lord gives yet more, in the paradoxes that, absent He will be present, unseen visible, and dying will be for them for ever, life and life-giving. These great thoughts go to the centre of their needs and of ours; and on them I now touch briefly.

There are in the words I have read, though they be but a fragment of a closely-linked together context, these three great thoughts then: the absent Christ the present Christ; the unseen Christ the seen Christ; the Christ who dies life and life-giving. Let us look at these as they stand.

I.—First, then, the absent Christ is the present Christ.

“I will not leave you comfortless,” or, as the Revised Version has it, “desolate—I come to you.” Now, most of us know, I suppose, that the literal meaning of the word rendered “comfortless,” or “desolate,” is “*orphans*.” But that is rather an unusual form in which to represent the relation between our Lord and His disciples. And so, possibly, our versions are accurate in giving the general idea of desolation rather than the specific idea conveyed directly by the word. But, still, it is to be remembered that this whole conversation begins with “Little children”; and there seems to be no strong reason for suppressing the literal meaning of the word, if only it be remembered that it is employed not so much to define Christ’s relation to His brethren as to describe the comfortless and helpless condition of that little group when left by Him. They would be like fatherless and motherless children in a cold world. And what is to hinder that? One thing only. “I come to you.” “Then, and only then, will you cease to be desolate and orphans. My presence will change everything, and turn winter into glorious summer.”

Now, what is this “coming”? It is to be observed that our Lord says, *not* “*I will*,” as a future, but “I come,” or “I am coming,” as an immediately impending-

ing, and, we may almost say, present, thing. There can be no reference in the word to that final coming to judgment which lies so far ahead; because, if there were, then there would follow from the text, that, until that period, all that love Him here upon earth are to wander about as orphans, desolate and forsaken; and that certainly can never be. So that we have to recognize here the promise of a coming which is contemporaneous with His absence, and which is, in fact, but the reverse side of His bodily absence.

It is true about Him that He "departs from" His people in bodily form "for a season, that they may receive Him" in a better form "for ever." This, then, is the heart and centre of the consolation here, that howsoever the external presence may be withdrawn, and the "foolish senses" may have to speak of an absent Christ, we may rejoice in the certainty that He is with all those that love Him, and all the more with them because of the very withdrawal of the earthly manifestation which has served its purpose, and now is laid aside as an impediment rather than as a help to the full communion. We confound *bodily* with *real*. The bodily presence is at an end; the real presence lasts for ever.

I do not need to insist, I suppose, upon the manifest implication of absolute Divinity which lies in such words as these. "I come." "Being absent, I am present in all generations. I am present with every single heart." That is equivalent to the Omnipresence of Deity; that is equivalent to or implies the undying existence of the Divine nature. And He that says, when He is leaving earth, and withdrawing the sweetness of His visible form from the eyes of men,

"I come," in the very act of going, "and I am with you always, with all of you to the end of the ages," can be no less than God, manifest in the flesh for a time, and present in the Spirit with His children for ever.

I cannot but think that the average Christian life of this day wofully fails in the simple, conscious realization of this great truth, and that we are all far too little living in the calm, happy, strengthening assurance that we are never alone, but have Jesus Christ with each of us more closely, more truly, in a more available fashion, and with more Omnipotence of influence than they had who were nearest Him during the days that He lived upon earth.

Oh, brethren, if we really believed, not as an article of our creed, which has become so familiar to us that it produces little impression upon us; but as a vital and ever-present conviction of our souls, that with us there was ever the real presence of the real Christ, how all burdens and cares would be lightened, how all perplexities would begin to smooth themselves out and be straightened, all the force would be sucked out of temptations, and how sorrows and joys and all things would be changed in their aspect by that one conviction intensely realized and constantly with us! A present Christ is the Strength, the Righteousness, the Peace, the Joy, and as we shall see, in the most literal sense, the Life of every Christian soul.

Then, note, further, that this coming of our Lord is identified with that of His Divine Spirit. He has been speaking of sending that "other Comforter," but though He be Another, He is yet so indissolubly united with Him who sends as that the coming of the Spirit

is the coming of Jesus. He is no gift wafted to us as from the other side of a gulf, but by reason of the unity of the Godhead and the Divinity of the sent Spirit, Jesus Christ and the Spirit whom He sends are inseparable though separate, and so indissolubly united that where the Spirit is, there is Christ, and where Christ is, there is the Spirit. These are amongst the deep things which the disciples were "not able to carry" at that stage of their development, and they waited for a further explanation. Enough for them, and enough for us, to know that we have Christ in the Spirit and the Spirit in Christ; and to remember "that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

We stand here on the margin of a shoreless and fathomless sea; and for my part I venture to think that the men who talk about the incredibilities and the contradictions of the orthodox faith would show themselves a little wiser if they were more conscious of the limitation of human faculty, and remembered that to pronounce upon contradictions in the doctrine of the Divine Nature implies that the pronouncer stands above and goes round about the whole of that Nature. So, for my part, abjuring omniscience and the comprehension of Deity, I accept the statement that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit come together and dwell in the heart.

Then, note, further, that this present Christ is the only Remedy for the orphanhood of the world. The words had a tender and pathetic reference to that little, bewildered group of followers, deprived of their Guide, their Teacher, and their Companion. He who had been as eyes to their weak vision, and Counsellor

and Inspirer and everything for three blessed years, was going away to leave them unsheltered to the storm. And we can understand how forlorn and terrified they were, when they looked forward to fronting the things that must come to them, without His presence. Therefore He cheers them with the assurance that they will not be left without Him, but that, present still just because He is absent, He will be all that He ever had been to them.

And the promise was fulfilled. How did that dispirited group of cowardly men ever pluck up courage to hold together after the Crucifixion at all? Why was it that they did not follow the example of John's disciples, and dissolve and disappear; and say, "The game is up. It is no use holding together any longer"? The process of separation began on the very day of the Crucifixion. Only one thing could have stopped it, and that is the Resurrection and the presence with His Church of the risen Christ in His power and in all the fulness of His gifts. If it had not been that He came to them, they would have disappeared, and Christianity would have been one more of the abortive sects forgotten in Judaism. But, as it is, the whole of the New Testament after Pentecost is aflame with the consciousness of a present Christ, working amongst His people. And although it be true that, in one aspect, we are "absent from the Lord" when we are present with the body, in another aspect, and an infinitely higher one, it is true that the strength of the Christian life of apostles and martyrs was this, the assurance that Christ Himself—no mere rhetorical metaphor for His influence or His example, or His memory lingering in their imaginations, but the

veritable Christ Himself—was present with them, to strengthen and to bless.

That same conviction you and I must have, if the world is not to be a desert and a dreary place for us. In a very profound sense it is true that if you take away Jesus Christ, the elder Brother, who alone reveals to men the Father, we are all orphans, fatherless children, who look up into an empty heaven and see nothing there. It is only Christ who reveals to us the Father and makes our happy hearts feel that we are of His children. And in the wider sense of the word "orphans," is not life a desolation without Him? Hollow joys, fleeting blessednesses, roses whose thorns last long after the petals have dropped, real sorrows, shows and shams, bitternesses and disappointments—are not these our life, in so far as Christ has been driven out of it? Oh! there is only one thing that saves us from being as desolate, fatherless children, groping in the dark for the lost Father's hand, and dying for want of it, and that is that the Christ Himself shall come to us and be with us.

II.—The unseen Christ is a seen Christ.

It is clear that the period referred to in the second clause of our text is the same as that referred to in the first, that "yet a little while" covers the whole space up to His ascension; and that if there be any reference at all to the forty days of His earthly life, during which, literally, the world "saw Him no more," but "the apostles saw Him," that reference is only secondary. These transitory appearances are not of sufficient moment or duration to bear the weight of so great a promise as this. The vision, which is the consequence of the coming, has the same extension in

time as the coming—that is to say, is continuous and permanent. We must read here the great promise of a perpetual vision of the present Christ. It is clear, too, that the word “see” is employed in these two clauses in two different senses. In the former it refers only to bodily sight, in the latter to spiritual perception. For a few short hours still, the ungodly mass of men were to have that outward vision which might have been so much to them, but which they had used so badly that “they seeing saw not.” It was to cease, and they who loved Him would not miss it when it did; but the withdrawal which hid Him from sense and sense-bound souls would reveal Him more clearly to His friends. They, too, had but dimly seen Him while He stood by them; they would gaze on Him with truer insight when He was present though absent.

So this is what every Christian life may and should be—the continual sight of a continually-present Christ. It is His part to come. It is ours to see, to be conscious of Him who does come.

Faith is the sight of the soul, and it is far better than the sight of the senses. It is more direct. My eye does not touch what I look at. Gulfs of millions of miles may lie between me and it. But my faith is not only eye, but hand, and not only beholds but grasps and comes into contact with that to which it is directed. It is far more clear. Senses may deceive; my faith, built upon His Word, cannot deceive. Its information is far more certain, far more valid. I have better reason for believing in Jesus Christ than I have for believing in the things that I touch and handle. So that there is no need for men to say, “Oh!

if we had only seen Him with our eyes!" You would very likely not have known Him if you had. There is no reason for thinking that the Church has retrograded in its privileges, because it has to love instead of beholding, and to believe instead of touching. That is advance, and we are better than they, inasmuch as the blessing of those who have not seen, and yet have believed, comes down upon our heads. The vision of Christ which is granted to the faithful soul is better and not worse, more and not less, other in kind indeed, but loftier in degree too, than that which was granted to the men who saw Him upon earth. Sense disturbs, faith alone beholds.

"The world seeth Me no more." Why? Because it is a world. "Ye see Me." Why? Because, and in the measure in which you have "turned away your eyes from seeing vanity." If you want the eye of the soul to be opened, you must shut the eye of sense. And the more we turn away from looking at the dazzling lies with which time and the material universe befool and bewilder us, the more shall we see Him whom to see is to live for ever.

Oh! brethren, does that strong word "see" in any measure express the vividness, the directness, the certainty of our realization of our Master's presence? Is Jesus Christ as clear, as perceptible, as sure to us as the men round us are? Which are the shadows and which are the realities to us? The things which are seen, which the senses crown as "real," or the things which cannot be seen because they are so great, and tower above us, invisible in their eternity? Which world are our eyes most open to, the world where Christ is, or the world here? Our happy eyes may

behold and our blessed hands may handle the Word of Life which was manifested to us. Let us beware that we turn not away from the one thing worthy to be looked at, to gaze upon a desolate and dreary world.

III.—Lastly, the present and seen Christ is life and life-giving.

The last words of my text may be connected with the preceding, as the marginal rendering of the Revised Version shows. But it is probably better to take them as standing independently, and presenting another and co-ordinate element of the blessedness arising from the coming of the Christ. Because He comes, His life passes into the hearts of the men to whom He comes, and who gaze upon Him.

Time forbids me to dwell upon that majestic proclamation of His own absolute and Divine life, from lips that were so soon to be paled with death. Mark the grand “I live”—the timeless present tense, which expresses unbroken, underived, undying, and, as I believe, Divine life. It is all but a quotation of the great Old Testament name “Jehovah.” The depth and sweep of its meaning are given to us in this apostle’s Apocalypse, where Christ is called “the living One,” who lived whilst He died, and having died “is alive for evermore.”

And this Christ, coming to all His friends, possessor of the fulness of life in Himself, and proclaiming His absolute possession of that life, even whilst He stands within arm’s length of Calvary, is life-giver to all that love Him and trust Him.

We live *because* He lives. In all senses of the word life, as I believe, the life of men is derived from the Christ who is the agent of creation, the channel from

whom life passes from the Godhead into the creatures, and who is also the one means by whom any of us can ever hope to live the better life which is the only true one, and consists in fellowship with God and union to Him.

We shall live *as long as* He lives, and His being is the pledge and the guarantee of the immortal being of all who love Him. Anything is possible, rather than that it should be credible that a soul, which has drawn spiritual life from Jesus Christ here upon earth, should ever be rent apart from Him by such a miserable and external trifle as the mere dissolution of the bodily frame. As long as Christ lives your life is secure. If the Head has life, the members cannot see corruption. "Take *me* not away in the midst of my days: *Thy* years are throughout all generations" was the prayer of a saint of old, deeply feeling the contrast of the worshipper's transiency and God's eternity, and dimly hoping that the contrast might be changed into likeness. The great promise of our text answers the prayer, and assures us that the worshipper is to live as long as does He whom he adores.

We shall live *as* He lives, nor ever cease the appropriation of His being until all His life we know, and all its fulness has expanded our natures—and that will be never. Therefore we shall not die.

Men's lives have been prolonged by the transfusion of blood from vigorous frames. Jesus Christ passes His own blood into our veins, and makes us immortal. The Church chose for one of its ancient emblems of the Saviour the pelican, which fed its young, according to the fable, with the blood from its own breast. So Christ vitalizes us. He in us is our life.

Brethren, without Jesus Christ we are orphans in a fatherless world. Without Him, our wearied and yet unsatisfied eyes have only trifles and trials and trash to look at. Without Him, we are dead whilst we live. He and He only can give us back a Father, and renew in us the spirit of sons. He and He only can satisfy our eyes with the sight which is purity and restfulness and joy. He and He only can breathe life into our death. Oh! Let Him do it for you. He comes to us with all these gifts in His hands, for He comes to give us Himself. And in Himself, as "in a box where sweets compacted lie," are all that lonely hearts and wearied eyes and dead souls can ever need. All are yours if you are Christ's. All are yours if He is yours. And He is yours if by faith and love you make yourselves His and Him your own.



The Gifts of the Present Christ.

“At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”—JOHN xiv. 20, 21.



WE have heard our Lord in the previous verse unveiling His deepest and strongest encouragements to His down-cast followers. These were: His presence with them, their true sight of Him, and their participation in His life. The first part of our present text is closely connected with these, for it gives us their upshot and consequence. Because Christ's true disciple is conscious of Christ's presence, sees Him with the eyes of his spirit, and draws life from Him, therefore he will know by experience the deep truths of Christ's indwelling at once in the Father and in His servant, and of His servant's indwelling in him. Our Lord had just previously been exhorting His disciples to *believe* that He was in the Father and the Father in Him; and had been gently wondering at the slowness of their

faith. Now He tells them that, when He is gone, their spiritual stature will be so increased as that they shall *know* the thing which, with Him by their side, they found it so hard to believe.

The second part of our present text is the close of this whole section of our Lord's discourse, and in it He urges the requirement of practical obedience, as the sign and test of love, and as the condition of receiving these high and wonderful things of which He has been speaking. He has been unveiling spiritual blessings, which may seem recondite and up in the clouds, and which, as a matter of fact, have often been perverted into dreamy mysticisms of a most immoral and unpractical kind. And so He brings us sharp back again here to very plain truths, and would teach us that all these lofty and ineffable gifts of which He has been dimly speaking are to be reached only by the common-place road of honest obedience and simple conformity to His commandments. In these last words of my text, He administers the antidote and the check to the possible abuses of the great things which He has been saying.

I.—Note, then, first, the knowledge that comes with the Christ who comes.

"In that day" covers the whole period of which He has been speaking, between His withdrawal from the disciples and His final corporeal coming to judgment—that great day of which generations are but the moments. In it the men who love Him are to have His presence, His vision, His life, and because they have, "Ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." The principle that underlies these wonderful words is that Christian

experience is the best teacher of fundamental Christian truth. Observe with what decision, and with what strange boldness, our Lord carries that principle into regions where we might suppose at first sight that it was altogether inapplicable. "Ye shall know that I am in My Father." How can such a thing as the relation between Christ and God ever be a matter of consciousness to us here upon earth? Must it not always be a truth that we must take on trust and believe because we have been told it, without having any verification in ourselves? Not so; remember what has gone before. If a man has the consciousness of Christ's presence with Him, sees Him with the true inward eye, which is the only real organ of real vision, and is drawing from Him, moment by moment, His own high and immortal life, then, is it not true that this man's experiences are of such a sort as to be utterly inexplicable, except on the ground that they come from a Divine source? If I have these things I know that it is Jesus Christ that gives them, and I know that He could not give them, if He did not dwell in God and were not Divine. These new influences, this revolution in my being, this healing, constraining, cleansing touch, these calming, gladdening, elevating powers, these new hopes, these reversed desires, loving all to which I was formerly indifferent, and growing dead to all that formerly appealed most strongly to me; all these things bear upon their very front the signature that they are wrought by a Divine hand, and as sure as I am of my own Christian consciousness, so sure am I that all its experiences proclaim their author, and that Christ who does them is in God. "Ye shall know that I am in My Father."

The New Testament, as I read it, is full at every point of the Divinity of Jesus Christ; and many profound and learned arguments on that subject have been urged by theologians, and these are all well and needful in their places, but the true way to be sure of it is to have Him dwelling with us and working in us; and then what was an article of belief becomes an article of knowledge, and we know Him to be our Saviour and the Son of God.

In like manner, and yet more obviously, the other elements of this knowledge which Christ promises here may be shown to flow naturally and necessarily from Christian experiences. "That ye are in Me, and I in you." If a Christian man carries the consciousness of Christ's presence, and has Him as a Sun in his darkness, and as a Life-source feeding his deadness with life, then he knows with a consciousness which is irrefragable that Jesus Christ is in him, for he feels His touch; and he knows that he is in Christ, for he is aware of the power that girdles him, and in which he has peace and righteousness and all.

So, dear brethren, let us learn what the Christian man's experience ought to be and to do for him. It should change the articles of your creed into elements of your consciousness. It should make all the fundamentals of the Gospel vitally and vividly true; and certified by what has passed within your own spirits. You should be able to say: "We have the witness in ourselves." And though there will remain much that is uncertain, much in Christian doctrine which is not capable of that plain and all-sufficing verification; much about which we must still depend on the mere teaching of others, or on our own study, the central

facts which make the Gospel may all become, by this plain and short path, elements of our very consciousness which stand undeniable to us, whosoever denies them.

Such a direct way to knowledge is reasonable, is in full analogy with the manner by which we attain to the knowledge of everything except the mere external facts, the knowledge of which has arrogated to itself the exclusive name of "science." How do you know anything about love? You may read poems and tragedies to the end of time, and you will not understand it until you come under its spell for yourself; and then all the things that men said about it cease to be mere words, because you yourself have experienced the emotion.

"He must be loved ere that to you
He will seem worthy of your love."

And the only way to be sure, with a vital certitude of Christ is to take Christ for your very own, and then He comes into your very being, and dwells there unchanged, the Sun and the Life.

So, dear brethren, though such certitude arising from experience, which in its nature is the very highest, is not available for other people, the fact that so many millions of men allege that in varying degrees they possess this certitude is available for other people. And there is nothing to be said by the unbeliever to this, the attestation of the Christian consciousness to the truth of the truths which it has tried. "Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not." You may jangle as much as you like about the questionable and controversial points that

surround the Christian revelation. I do not care in the present connection what answer you give to them. "Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And we may push the war into the enemy's quarters, and say: "Why! herein is a marvellous thing, that you that know everything do not know whence this man is. And yet He has opened mine eyes." You want facts; there are some. You want verification; we have verified by experiment, and we set to our seals that God is true.

Oh! but you say that is not a fair account of the way in which Christian men and women generally feel about this matter. Well, all that I can say about that is, so much the worse for the so-called Christian men and women. And if they are Christians, and do not know by this inward experience that Christ is Divine and their Saviour, then there is only one of two reasons to be given for it; either their experience is so wretchedly superficial and fragmentary, so rudimentary as to be scarcely worth calling by the name; or, having the facts, they have failed to appreciate their significance, and to make their own by reflection the certitudes which are their own.

Brethren, it becomes every Christian man and woman to be able to say, "Because I have Christ with me, and see Him, and derive my life from Him, I know that He is in the Father and I in Him, and He in me." And if you cannot say that, it is your grasp of Him, or your meditation upon what you have got by your grasp, that is painfully and sinfully defective.

II.—My text speaks of the obedience which is the sign and test of love.

The words here are substantially equivalent to former words in the chapter which we have already considered, where our Lord says :—" If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments."

There is, however, a slight difference in the point of view in the two sayings; the former begins with the root and traces it upwards and outwards to its fruits, love blossoming into obedience. Our text reverses the process, and takes the thing by the other end; begins with the fruits and traces them downwards and inwards to the root. "He that hath and keepeth My commandments, He it is that loveth Me." The two sayings substantially mean the same thing; but in the one love is put first as the cause of obedience, and in the other obedience is put first, as the certain fruit and sure sign of love. The connection between these and the preceding words is, as I have already pointed out, that our Lord here brings all His lofty promises down to the sharp, practical requirement of obedience, as the only condition on which they can be fulfilled.

So note, and very briefly about this matter, how remarkably our Lord here declares the *possession* of His commandments to be a sign of love to Him. "He that *hath*," a word which is generally passed over in our reading—"He that hath My commandments, He it is that loveth Me." Of course there are two ways of having His commandments; there is having them in the Bible, and there is having them in the heart;—present before my eye, as a law that I ought to obey, or present within my will, as a power that shapes it. And the latter is the only kind of "having" that Christ

regards as real and valid. The rest is only preparatory and surface. Love possesses the knowledge of the loved one's will. Is not that true? Do we not all know how strange is the power of divining desires that goes along with true affection, and how the power, not only of divining, but of treasuring, these desires is the test and the thermometer of our true love? Some of us, perhaps, have laid away in sacred, secret places tattered, yellow, old bits of paper with the words of a dear one on them, that we would not part with. "He that hath My commandments" laid up in lavender in the deepest recesses of his faithful heart, he it is "that loveth Me."

In like manner, our Lord says, the practical obedience to His commandments is the sure sign and test of love. I need not dwell upon that. There are two motives for keeping commandments—one because they are commanded, and one because we love Him that commands. The one is slavery, the other is liberty. The one is like the Arctic regions, cold and barren, the other is like tropical lands, full of warmth and sunshine, glorious and glad fertility.

The form of the sentence suggests how easy it is for people to delude themselves about their love to Jesus Christ. That emphatic "He," and the putting first of the character before He states its root, are directed against false pretensions to love. The love that Christ stamps with His hall-mark, and passes as genuine, is no mere emotion, however passionate, however sweet; no mere sentiment, however pure, however deep. The tiniest little dribble that drives a mill is better than a Niagara that rushes and foams and tumbles idly. And there is ever so much so-called love to Jesus Christ

that goes masquerading up and down the world, from which the paint is stripped by the sharp application of the words of my text. Character and conduct are the true demonstrations of Christian love, and it is only such love that He accepts.

III.—Lastly, notice the further and sweeter gifts of Divine love and manifestation, which reward our love and obedience. “He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”

Two things, then, He tells us, are the rich rewards and sparkling crowns with which He crowns our poor love to Him—the love of the Father and the love of the Christ, separate and yet united, and the further manifestation of Christ’s sweetness to the waiting heart. Note, as to the first, the extraordinary boldness of that majestic saying: “If a man loves *Me*, My Father will love *him*.” God regards our love to Jesus Christ as the fulfilling of the law, as equivalent to our supreme love to Himself, as containing in it the germ of all that is pleasing in His sight. And so, upon our hearts, if we love Christ, there falls the benediction of the Father’s love.

Of course I need not remind you that our Lord here is not beginning at the very beginning of everything; for prior to all men’s love to Christ is Christ’s love to men, and ours to Him is but the reflection and the echo, called forth by His to us. “We love Him because He first loved us” digs a story deeper down in the building than the words of my text, which is speaking, not of the process by which a man comes to receive the love of God for the first time, but of the process by which a Christian man grows in his

possession of it. That being understood, here is a great lesson. It is not all the same to God whether a man is a scoundrel or a saint. The Divine love is over all its works, and embraces every variety of humanity, the most degraded, alien, hostile. But in this generation, as it seems to me, there is great need for preaching that whilst that is gloriously and blessedly true, the other thing is just as true, that to know the deepest depth and to taste the sweetest sweetness of the love of our Father God, there must be in our hearts love to Him whom He has sent, which manifests itself by our obedience. God's love is a moral love; and whilst the sunbeams play upon the ice and melt it sometimes, they flash back from, and rest more graciously and fully on, the rippling stream into which the ice has turned. God loves them that love Him not, but the depths of His heart and the secret, sacred favours of His grace can only be bestowed upon those who in some measure are conformed, and are growingly being conformed, to His likeness in Jesus Christ, and who love Him and obey Him.

And, in like manner, my text tells us that if we seek to know all that is possible for us here, amidst the clouds, and shadows, and darknesses, to know of that dear Lord, the path to such knowledge is plain. Walk on the way of obedience, and Christ will meet us with the unveiling of more and more of His love. To live what we believe is the sure way to increase its amount. To be faithful to the little is the certain way to inherit the much. And Christ manifests Himself, in all deep and recondite sweetness, gentleness, constraining power, to the men who treasure the partial knowledge as yet possessed, in their loving

hearts and obedient wills, and who make a conscience of translating all their knowledge into conduct, and of basing all their conduct on knowledge of Him. He gives us His whole self at the first, but we traverse the breadth of the gift by degrees. He puts himself into our hands and into our hearts, when we humbly trust Him, and imperfectly try to love Him. But the flower is but a bud when we get it, and, as we hold it, it opens its petals to the light.

So, if "any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine"; and if, touched by His Divine love and infinite sacrifice for me, I cast my poor self upon Him, and try to love Him back again, and to keep His commandments because I love, then day by day I shall realize more and more of His strong, immortal, all-satisfying love, and see more and more deeply into that Saviour, whose infinite beauties remain unrevealed after all revelation, and to know more and more of Whom shall be the Heaven of Heavens yonder, as it is the joy and life of the soul here.



XI.

Who bring and who repel Christ.

"Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me He will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me."—JOHN xiv. 22—24.



HIS Judas held but a low place amongst the apostles. In all the lists he is one of the last group of fours, into which they are divided, and which were evidently arranged according to their spiritual nearness to the Master. His question is exactly that which a listener, with some dim, confused glimmer of Christ's meaning, might be expected to ask. He grasps at His last words about manifesting Himself to certain persons; he rightly feels that he and his brethren possess the qualification of love. He rightly understands that our Lord contemplates no public showing of Himself, and that disappoints him. It was only a day or two ago that Jesus seemed to them to have begun to do what they had always wanted Him to do, manifest Himself to the world.

And now, as he thinks, something unknown to them must have happened in order to make Him change His course, and go back to the old plan of a secret communication. And so he says, "Lord! *What has come to pass* to induce you to abandon and falter upon the course on which we entered, when you rode into Jerusalem with the shouting crowd?"

His question is no better in intelligence, though it is a great deal better in spirit, than the taunt of Christ's brethren, "If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world." Judas, too, thought of the simple flashing of His Messianic glory, in some visible vulgar form, before else blind eyes.

How sad and chilling such a question must have been to Jesus! Slow scholars we all are; and with what wonderful patience, without a word of pain or of rebuke, He reiterates His lesson, here a little and there a little, and once more unfolds the conditions of His self-revelation, and the fulness of the blessings that He brings. He moulds His words so as to meet both the clauses of Judas's foolish question—"To us, not to the world"; and quietly tells them the positive conditions and the negative disqualifications for His self-revelation. So my text deals with two things, the crown of loving obedience in the possession of a fuller Christ, and the impassable barrier to His manifestation which unloving disobedience makes. Or, to put it into briefer words, we have in one of the verses—first, what brings Christ and what Christ brings; and, in the other, second, what keeps away Christ and all His gifts. Now let us look at these two things.

I.—We have what brings Christ and what Christ brings.

“If a man love Me, he will keep My word” (not “words,” as our Authorized Version has it), “and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.” Now notice how here, in the first part of this verse, our Lord subtly and significantly alters the form of the statement which He has already made. He had formerly said, “If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments,” but now He casts it into a purely impersonal form, and says, “*If a man*,” anybody, not “you” only, but anybody—“If a man love Me, he,” anybody, “will keep My word.” And why the change? Why, I suppose, in order to strike full and square against that complacent assumption of Judas that it was “to us and not to the world” that the showing was to take place. Our Lord, by the studiously impersonal form into which He casts the promise, proclaims its universality, and says this to His ignorant questioner, “Do not suppose that you apostles have the monopoly. You may not even have a share in My self-manifestation. Anybody may have it. And there is no ‘world,’ as you suppose, to which I do not show Myself. Anybody may have the vision if he observes the conditions.”

Now, I need not dwell at any length upon the earlier words of this text, because we have had to consider them in previous sermons on the former verses of this chapter. I need only remark that here, as there, our Lord brings out the thought that the very lifeblood of love is the treasuring of the word of the beloved One; and that there is no joy comparable to the joy of the loving heart that yields itself to the Beloved’s will. That is true about earth, and it makes the sweetest and selectest blessedness of our ordinary

existence. And it is true about heaven, and it makes the liberty and the gladness of the bond that knits us to Him.

But I would like just to notice, before I come to the more immediate subject of my discourse, that remarkable expression, "He will keep My *word*." That is more than a "commandment," is it not? Christ's "word" is wider than *precept*. It includes all His sayings, and it includes them all as in one vital unity and organic whole. We are not to go picking and choosing among them; they are one. And it includes this other thought, that every word of Christ, be it revelation of the deep things of God, or be it a promise of the great shower of blessings which, out of His full hand, He will drop upon our heads, enshrines within itself a commandment. He has no revelations, simply that we may know. He has no comforting words, simply that our sore hearts may be healed, but in all His utterances there is a practical bearing; and every word of His teaching, and every word of His sweet, whispered assurances of love and favour to the waiting heart, hath in it the imperativeness of His manifested will, and has a direct bearing upon duty. All His *words* are gathered into one *word*, and all the variety of His sayings is, in their unity, the law of our lives. So much by way of observation on the mere language of my text. And now let us look at what, as He says to us here, are the rewards and crown of loving obedience.

Christ will show Himself to the loving heart. That is true on the very lowest level. Every act of obedience to any moral truth is rewarded by additional insight. Every act of submission to His will cleans the lenses of the telescope from some film that has

gathered upon them, and so the stars look brighter and larger and nearer. All duty done opens out into a loftier conception of duty, and a clearer vision of Him. "To him that hath shall be given." As we climb the hill we get a wider view. Obedience is in all things the parent of insight.

But in reference to our relation to Him, we have to do not with truths only, but with a Person. How do we learn to know people? There is only one way—that is, by loving them. Sympathy is the parent of all true knowledge of one another. They tell us in the foolish old proverb that "love is blind." No! There are not such a pair of clear eyes anywhere as the eyes of love; and if we want to see into a man, the first condition is that we feel kindly towards him. Sympathy is the parent of insight into persons, as Obedience is the parent of insight into duty.

But both of these illustrations are only imperfect preparations for the great truth here, which is that our loving obedience to the discerned will of Jesus Christ has not only an operation inwards upon us, but has an effect outwards upon Him. I am afraid that Christian people in this generation have but a very imperfect belief in the actual, supernatural, and if you like to call it so, miraculous manifestation of Jesus Christ His very Self, to men that love Him and cleave to Him. Do you believe as a simple revealed truth, plain as a sunbeam, in such words as these, that Jesus Christ Himself will do something on you, and in you, and for you, if you love Him and trust Him: that His hand will be laid on your eyes as it was laid of old; that He will indeed, in no metaphor, but in reality, show Himself to you? I may be mistaken,

but I think that too commonly is it the case, that even good Christian people have a far more vivid and realizing and real faith in the past work of Christ on earth than in the present work of Christ in themselves. They think the one a plain truth, and the other something like a metaphor, whereas the New Testament teaches us, as plainly as it can teach us anything, that, far above all the natural operations of truth upon our understandings, hearts, and wills, there is an actual supernatural, continuous communication of Christ to the hearts that love Him, which leads day by day, if they be faithful, to a fuller knowledge, a sweeter love, a larger possession, of a fuller Christ. And it is this that He tells us of, to fire our ambition to attain, in such words as these.

Brethren, one piece of honest, loving obedience is worth all the study and speculation of an unloving heart when the question is, "How are we to see Christ?"

Again, Jesus shows Himself to the obedient heart in indissoluble union with the Father. Look at the majesty and, except upon one hypothesis, the insane presumption of such words as these: "If a man love *Me*, My Father will love *him*"; as if identifying love to Christ with love to Himself. And look at that wondrous union, the consciousness of which speaks in "*We* will come." Think of a *man* saying that. Blasphemous insanity; or else the speech of Him who is conscious of union with the Father, close and indissoluble and transcending all analogies. "*We* will come," together, hand-in-hand, if I may so say; or rather, "My coming is the Father's coming." Just as in heaven, so closely are They represented as united

that there is but one throne for God and the Lamb, so on earth so closely are They represented as united that there is but one coming of the Father in the Son.

And this is the only belief, as it seems to me, that will keep this generation from despair and moral suicide. The question for this generation is, Is it possible for men to know God? Science, both of material things and of inward experiences, is more and more unanimous in its proclamation; "Behold! we know not anything"; and the only attitude to take before that great black vault above us is to say, "We know nothing." The world has learned half of a great verse of the Gospel. "No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him." If the world is not to go mad, if hearts are not to be tortured into despair, if morality and enthusiasm and poetry and everything higher and nobler than the knowledge of material phenomena and their sequences is not to perish from the earth, the world must learn the next half of the verse, and say, "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Christ shows Himself in indissoluble union with the Father.

Lastly about this matter, Christ shows Himself to obedient love by a true coming. "We will come and make our mansion with him." And that coming is a fact of a higher order, and not to be confounded either with the mere Divine Omnipresence, by which God is everywhere, nor to be reduced to a figment of our own imaginations, or a strong way of promising increased perception on our part of Christ's fulness. That great central Sun, if I might use so violent a figure, draws nearer and nearer and nearer to the

planets that move about it, and having once been far-off in an almost infinitely distant horizon, approaches until planet and Sun unite.

Dear brethren, if we could only get to the attitude of simple acceptance of this as a literal truth, and believe that, in prose reality, Christ comes to every heart that loves Him, would not all the world be different to us ?

That coming is a permanent residence : " We will make our *abode* with him." Very beautiful is it to notice that our Lord here employs that same sweet and significant word, with which he began this wonderful series of encouragements, when He said, " In My Father's house are many *mansions*." Yonder they dwell for ever with God ; here God in Christ for ever dwells with the loving heart. It is a permanent abode so long as the conditions are fulfilled, but only so long. If self-will, rising from its torpor and apparent death in the Christian heart, re-asserts itself and shakes off Christ's yoke, Christ's presence vanishes. In the last hours of the Holy City, there was heard by the trembling priests amidst the midnight darkness the motion of departing Deity, and a great voice said, " Let us depart hence " ; and to-morrow the shrine was empty, and the day after it was in flames. Brethren, if you would keep the Christ in Whom is God, remember that we cannot be kept but by the act of loving obedience.

II.—Now, in the next place, my text gives us the negative side, and shows us what keeps away Christ and all His blessings.

An unloving disobedience closes the eyes to the vision, and the heart against the entrance, of that dear Lord. Our Master lays down for us two

principles, and leaves us to draw the conclusion for ourselves.

The first is, "He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings." No love, no obedience. That is plainly true, because the heart of all the commandments is love, and, where that is not, disobedience to their very spirit is. That is plainly true, because there is no power that will lead men to true obedience to Christ's yoke except the power of love. His commandments are too alien from our nature ever to be kept, unless by the might of love. It was only the rising sun-beam that could draw music from the stony lips of Memnon, as he gazed out across the desert. And it is only when Christ's love shines on our faces that we open our lips in praise, and move our hands in service. Those great rocking-stones down in Cornwall stand unmoved by any tempest, but a child's finger, put at the right place, will set them vibrating. And so the heavy, hard, stony bulk of our hearts lies torpid and immovable, until He lays His loving finger upon them, and then they rock at His will. There is no keeping of Christ's commandments without love.

That makes short work of a great deal that calls itself Christianity, does it not? Reluctant obedience is no obedience; self-interested obedience is no obedience; constrained obedience is no obedience; outward facts of service, if the heart be wanting, are rubbish and dung. Morality without religion is naught. The one thing that makes a good man is love to Jesus Christ; and where that is, there, and only there, is obedience.

Talk they of morals! O! Thou Bleeding Lamb,
The grand morality is love to Thee.

"If a man love Me not, he will not keep My words."

Then the second principle is, disobedience to Christ is disobedience to God. "The Word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's." Christ's consciousness of union so speaks out here as that He is quite sure that all His words are God's words, and that all God's words are spoken by Him. Paul has to say, "So speak I, not the Lord." And you would not think a man a very sound or safe religious teacher who said to you, to begin with, "Now, mind, everything that I say, God says." There are no errors then, no deterioration of the treasure by the vessel in which it lies. The water does not taste of the vase in which it is carried. The personality of Jesus Christ is never, through all His utterances, so separated but that God speaks in Him; and, listening to His voice, we hear the absolute utterance of the uncreated and eternal wisdom.

Therefore follows the conclusion, which our Lord does not state, but leaves us to supply. If it be true that the absence of love of Him is disobedience to Him, and if it be true that disobedience to Him is disobedience to God, then it plainly follows that what keeps away Christ and all His gifts, and God in Him, is unloving obedience. What brings Him is the obedience of love; what repels Him is alienation and rebellion. If the heart be full of confusion, of the world, of self, of unbridled inclinations, of careless indifference to His bleeding love, He "can but listen at the gate and hear the household jar within."

And so, dear friends, from all this there follow one or two points, which I touch very briefly. One is, that it is possible for men not to see Christ, though He

stands there close before them. It is possible to grope at noonday as at midnight, to see only bracken green and cold grey stone on the hillside, where another man sees the chariots of fire and the horses of fire. It is possible for you—and, alas! it is the condition of some of my hearers—to look upon Christ and to turn away and say, “I see no beauty in Him that I should desire Him,” whilst the man beside you, looking at the same facts and the same face, can see in Him the “Chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.”

Another thought is, that Christ’s showing of Himself to men is in no sense arbitrary. It is you that determine what you shall see. You can hermetically seal your heart against Him, you can blind yourselves to all His beauty. The door of your hearts is hinged to open from within, and if you do not open it, it stops shut, and Christ stops outside.

Another thought is, that you do not need to *do* anything to blind yourselves. Simple negation is fatal. “If a man love not;” that is all. The absence of love is your ruin.

And the last thought is this, that my text does not begin at the beginning. Jesus Christ has been speaking about manifestations of Himself to the loving and obedient; but there are manifestations of Himself, made that we may *become* loving and obedient. You can build a barrier over which these sweeter revelations, of which loyal love and docile submission are the conditions, cannot rise. But you cannot build a barrier over which the prior revelations to the unthankful and disobedient cannot rise. No mountains of sin and neglect and alienation can be piled so high but that the flood of pardoning grace will rise above

their crests, and pour itself into your hearts. You ask, How can I get the love and obedience of which you have been singing the praises now? There is only one answer, brethren. We know that we love Him when we know that He loves us; and we know that He loves us when we see Him dying on His cross. So here is the ladder, that starts down in the miry clay of the horrible pit, and fastens its golden hooks on His throne. The first round is, Behold the dying Christ and His love to me. The second is, Let that love melt my heart into sweet responsive love. The third is, Let my love mould my life into obedience. And then Christ, and God in Him, will come to me and show Himself to me; and give me a fuller knowledge and a deeper love, and make His dwelling with me.

And then there is only one step left, and that will land us by the Throne of God, in the many mansions of the Father's house, where we shall make our abode with Him for ever more.



XII.

The Teacher Spirit.

“These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name. He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”—JOHN xiv. 25, 26.



HIS wonderful outpouring of consolation and instruction with which our Lord sought to soothe the pain of parting is nearing its end. We have to conceive of a slight pause here, whilst He looks back upon what He has been saying, and contrasts His teaching with that of the Comforter, whom He has once already, though in a different connection, promised to His followers. He speaks of His earthly residence with them as being “an abiding,” distinctly therein referring to what He has just said, that the Father and He will, in the future, “make their abode” with His disciples. He contrasts the outward and transitory presence, which was now nearing its end, with the inward and continuous presence which its end was to inaugurate.

And, in like manner, with, at first sight, startling

humility, He contrasts "these things," the partial and, to a large extent, unintelligible utterances which He had given with His human lips, with the complete, universal teaching of that Divine Spirit, who was to instruct in "all things" pertaining to man's salvation. We have then, here, sketched in broad outline, the great truths concerning the ever-present, inward Teacher of God's Church who is to come, now that the earthly manifestation of Christ, whom the twelve called their "Teacher," had reached a close. I think we may best gain the deep instruction which lies in the words before us, if we look at three points of view which they bring into prominence: the Teacher, His lesson, and His scholars.

I.—Now as to the first, the promised Teacher.

I need not repeat what I have said in former sermons as to the wide sweep of that word, "the Comforter," beyond just reminding you that it means literally one who is called to the side of another, primarily for the purpose of being his representative in some legal process; and more widely, for any purpose of help, encouragement, and strength. That being so, "Comforter," in its modern sense of *Consoler*, is far too narrow for the full force of the word, which means much rather "Comforter," in its ancient and etymological sense of one who, in company with another, makes him strong and brave.

But the point to which I desire to turn attention now is this, that this comforting and strengthening office of the Divine Spirit is brought into immediate connection here with the conception of Him as a Teacher. That is to say, the best strength that God, by His Spirit, can give us is by our firm grasp and

growing clearness of understanding of the truths which are wrapped up in Jesus Christ. All power for endurance, for service, is there, and when the Spirit of God teaches a man what God reveals in Christ, He therein and thereby most fully discharges His office of Strengtheners.

Then, note, still further, the other designation of this Divine Teacher which is here given, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost."

We might have expected, as indeed we find in another context of this great final discourse, the "Spirit of *Truth*" as appropriate in connection with the office of teaching. But is there not a profound lesson for us here in this, that, side by side with the thought of illumination, there lies the thought of purity built upon consecration, which is the Scripture definition of holiness? That suggests that there is an indissoluble connection between the real knowledge of God's truth and practical holiness of life. That connection is of a double sort. There is no holiness without such knowledge, and there is no such knowledge without holiness.

There is no real knowledge of Christ and His truth without purity of heart. The man who has no musical taste can never be brought to understand the deep harmonies of the great masters and magicians of sound. The man who has no eye for beauty can never be brought to bow his spirit before some of those embodiments of loveliness and sublimity which the painter's brush has cast upon the canvas. And the man who has no longings after purity, nor has attained to any degree of moral conformity with the Divine image, is not in possession of the sense which

is needed in order that he should understand the deep things of God.

The scholars in this school have to wash their hands before they go to school, and come there with clean hands and clean hearts. Foulness and the love of it are bars to all understanding of God's truth. And, on the other hand, the truest inducements, motives, and powers for purity are found in that great word, which is all "according to godliness," and is meant much rather to make us good than to make us wise.

So, in this designation of the teaching Spirit as holy, there lie lessons for two classes of people. All fanatical professions of possessing Divine illumination, which are not warranted and sealed by purity of life, are lies or self-delusion. And, on the other hand, cold-blooded intellectualism will never force the locks of the palace of Divine truth, but they that come there must have clean hands and a pure heart; and only those who have the love and the longing for goodness will be wise scholars in Christ's school. Your theology is nothing unless its distinct outcome is morality, and you must be prepared to accept the painful, the punitive, the purifying influences of that Divine Spirit on your moral natures, if you want to have His enlightening influences shining on the "truth as it is in Jesus." "If any man wills to do His will, he," and only he, "shall know of the doctrine." Knowledge and holiness in Divine things are as inseparable as light and heat.

And, still further, note that this great Teacher is "sent by God" in Christ's name. That pregnant phrase, "in My name," cannot be represented by any

one form of expression into which we may translate it, but covers a large space. God in Christ's name sends the Spirit. That is to say, in some deep sense God acts as Christ's Representative; just as Christ comes in the Father's name and acts as His Representative. And, again, God sends in Christ's name. That is, the historical manifestation of Christ is the basis on which the sending of the Spirit is possible, and rests. The revelation had to be complete before He who came to unfold the meaning of the revelation had material to work upon. The Spirit, which is sent in Christ's name, has, for the basis of His mission, and the sphere in which He acts, the recorded facts of Christ's life and death, these and none other.

And then note, finally, about this matter, the strong and unmistakeable declaration here, that that Divine Spirit is a Person. "He shall teach you all things." They tell us that the doctrine of the Trinity is not in the New Testament. The *word* is not, but the *thing* is. In this verse we have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit brought into such close and indissoluble union as is only vindicated from the charge of blasphemy by the belief in the divinity of each. Just as the apostolic benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit," necessarily involves the divinity of all who are thus invoked, so we stand here in the presence of a truth which pierce into the deeps of Deity.

That Divine Spirit is more than an influence. "He shall teach," and He can be grieved by evil and sin. I do not enlarge upon these thoughts. My purpose is mainly to bring them out clearly before you.

II.—I pass in the second place to the consideration of the Lesson which this promised Teacher gives.

Mark the words, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever *I* have said unto you." Now, as we have seen in the exposition of the words "in My name," the whole subject-matter of the Divine Spirit's teaching is the life and work and death and person of Jesus Christ. "He shall teach you all things" is wider than "He shall bring all things which I have said to you, to your remembrance." But whilst that is so, the clear implication of the words before us is that Christ is the lesson book, of which the Divine Spirit is the Teacher. His weapon, to take another metaphor, with which He plies men's hearts and minds and wills, convincing the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and leading those who are convinced into deeper knowledge and larger wisdom, is the recorded facts concerning the life and manifestation of Jesus Christ.

The significance of this lesson book, the history of our Lord, cannot be unfolded all at once. There is something altogether unique in the incorruption and germinant power of all His deeds and of all His words. This Carpenter of Nazareth has reached the heights which the greatest thinkers and poets of the past have never reached, or only in little snatches and fragments of their words. *His* words open out, generation after generation, into undreamed-of wisdom, and there are found to be hived in them stores of sweetness that were never suspected, until the occasion came that drew them forth. The world and the Church received Christ, as it were, in the dark; and,

as with some man receiving a precious gift as the morning was dawning, each fresh moment revealed, as the light grew, new beauties and new preciousness in the thing possessed. So Christ, in His infinite significance, fresh and new for all generations, was given at first, and ever since the Church and the world have been learning the meaning of the gift which they received. Christ's words are inexhaustible, and the Spirit's teaching is to unveil more and more the infinite significance that lies in the apparently least significant of them.

Now, then, note that if this be our Lord's meaning here, Jesus Christ plainly anticipated that, after His departure from earth, there should be a development of Christian doctrine. We are often taunted with the fact, which is exaggerated for the purpose of controversy, that a clear and full statement of the central truths, which orthodox Christianity holds, is found rather in the apostolic epistles than in the Master's words, and the shallow axiom is often quoted with great approbation: "Jesus Christ is our Master, and not Paul." I do not grant that the germs and the central truths of the Gospel are not to be found in Christ's words, but I admit that the full, articulate statement of them is to be found rather in the servant's letters, and I say that is exactly what Jesus Christ told us to expect, that after He was gone, words that had been all obscure, and thoughts that had been only fragmentarily intelligible, would come to be seen clearly, and would be discerned for what they were. The earlier disciples had only a very partial grasp of Christ's nature. They knew next to

nothing of the great doctrine of sacrifice; they knew nothing about His resurrection; they did not in the least understand that He was going back to heaven; they had but glimmering conceptions of the spirituality or universality of His Kingdom. Whilst they were listening to Him at that table they did not believe in the Atonement; they but dimly believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ; they did not believe in His resurrection; they did not believe in His ascension; they did not believe that He was founding a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom that was to rule over all the world till the end of time. None of these things were in their mind. They had all been in germ in His words. And after He was gone, there came over them a breath of the teaching Spirit, and the unintelligible flashed up into significance. The history of the Church is the proof of the truth of this promise, and if anybody says to me, "Where is the fulfilment of the promise of a spirit that will bring all things to your remembrance?" I say, Here, in this Book! These four Gospels, these apostolic Epistles, show that the word which our Lord here speaks has been gloriously fulfilled. Christ anticipated a development of doctrine, and it casts no slur or suspicion on the truthfulness of the apostolic representation of the Christian truths, that they are only sparsely and fragmentarily to be found in the records of Christ's life.

Then there is another practical conclusion from the words before us, on which I touch for a moment, and that is, If Jesus Christ and the deep understanding of Him be the true lesson of the Divine, teaching Spirit, then real progress consists, not in getting

beyond Christ, but in getting more fully into Him. We hear a great deal in these days about advanced thought and progressive Christianity. I hope I believe in the continuous advance of Christian thought as joyfully as any man, but my notion of it—and I humbly venture to say Christ's notion of it—is to get more and more into His heart, and to find within Him, and not away from Him, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” We leave all other great men behind. All other teachers' words become feeble by age, as their persons become ghostly, wrapped in thickening folds of oblivion; but the progress of the Church consists in absorbing more and more of Christ, in understanding Him better, and becoming more and more moulded by His influence. The Spirit's teaching brings out the ever fresh significance of the ancient and perpetual revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

III.—And now, lastly, note the Scholars.

Primarily, of course, these are the apostolic group; but the apostles, in all these discourses, stand as the representatives of the Church, and not as separated from it. And whilst the teaching Spirit could “bring to the remembrance” only of those who first heard them the “words that He said unto them,” that Spirit's teaching function is not limited to those who listened to the Lord Jesus. The fire that was kindled on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes, nor the river that then broke forth been sucked up by thirsty sands of successive generations, but the fire is still with us, and the river still flows near our lips, and we, too, may be taught by that Divine Spirit. For this very Evangelist, in writing this epistle, has at least two

distinct references to, and almost verbal quotations of, this promise, when he says, addressing all his Asiatic brethren, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." And, again, "The unction which ye have of Him abideth with you, and ye need not that any man should teach you."

So, then, Christian men and women, every believing soul has this Divine Spirit for His Teacher, and the humblest of us may, if we will, learn of Him, and be led by Him into profounder knowledge of that great Lord.

Oh ! dear brethren, the belief in the actual presence with the church of a Spirit, that teaches all faithful members thereof, is far too much lost out of the sight of the common Christianity of this day. We ought to be the standing witnesses in the world of the reality of a supernatural influence, and how can we be, if we do not believe it ourselves, and never feel that we are under it ?

But whilst a continuous inspiration from that self-same Spirit is the prerogative of all believing souls, let us not forget that the early teaching is the standard by which all such must be tried. As, to the first disciples, the office of the Divine Spirit was to bring before them the deep significance of their Master's life and words, so to us the office of the teaching Spirit is to bring to our minds the deep significance of the record by these earliest scholars of what they learned from Him. The authority of the New Testament over our faith is based upon these words, and Paul's warning applies especially to this generation, with its thoughts about a continuous inspiration and outgrowing of the New Testament

teaching:—"If a man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

Now from all this take three counsels. Let this great promise fill us with shame. Look at Christendom. Does it not contradict such words as these? Disputatious sects, Christians scarcely agreed upon any one of the great central doctrines, seem a strange fulfilment. The present condition of Christendom does not prove that Jesus Christ did not send the Spirit, but it does prove that Christ's followers have been woefully remiss and negligent in their acceptance and use of the Spirit. What slow scholars we are! How little we have learnt! How we have let passion, prejudice, human voices, the babble of men's tongues, anybody and everybody take the office of teaching us God's truth, instead of waiting before Him and letting His Spirit teach us! It is the shame of us Christians that, with such a Teacher, we, "when for the time we ought to be teachers, have need that one teach us again which be the first principles of the oracles of Christ."

Let it fill us with desire and with diligence. Let it fill us with calm hope. They tell us that Christianity is effete. Have we got all out of Jesus Christ that is in Him? Is the process that has been going on for all these centuries to stop now? No! Depend upon it the new problems of this generation will find their solution where the old problems of past generations have found theirs, and the old commandment of the old Christ will be the new commandment of the new Christ.

Foolish men both on the Christian and on the anti-

Christian side stand and point to the western sky and say, "The Sun is setting." But there is a flush in the opposite horizon in an hour, as at midsummer; and that which sank in the west rises fresh and bright in the east for a new day. Jesus Christ is the Christ for all the ages and for every soul, and the world will only learn more and more of His inexhaustible fulness. So let us be ever quiet, patient, hopeful amidst the babble of tongues and the surges of controversy, assured that all change will but make more plain the inexhaustible significance of the infinite Christ, and that humble and obedient hearts will ever possess the promised Teacher, nor ever cry in vain, "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good, lead me into the paths of uprightness."



XIII.

Christ's Peace.

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—JOHN xiv. 27.



“PEACE be unto you” was, and is, the common Eastern salutation, both in meeting and in parting. It carries us back to a state of society in which every stranger might be an enemy

It is a confession of the deep unrest of the human heart. Christ was about closing His discourse, and the common word of leave-taking came naturally to His lips ; just as when He first met His followers after the Resurrection, He soothed their fears by the calm and familiar greeting, “Peace be unto you.” But common words deepen their force and meaning when He uses them. In Him “all things become new,” and on His lips the conventional, threadbare salutation changes into a tender and mysterious communication of a real gift. His words are deeds, and His wishes for His disciples fulfil themselves.

I.—So we have here, first, the greeting, which is a gift—“Peace I leave with you. My peace give I unto you.”

We have seen, in former discourses on this chapter, how prominently and repeatedly our Lord insists on the great truth of His dwelling with and in His disciples. He gives His peace because He gives Himself; and in the bestowal of His life He bestows, in so far as we possess the gift, the qualities and attributes of that life. His peace is inseparable from His presence. It comes with Him, like an atmosphere; it is never where He is not. It was His peace inasmuch as, in His own experience, He possessed it. His manhood was untroubled by perturbation or tumult, by passions or contending desires, and no outward things could break His calm. If we open our hearts by lowly faith, love, and aspiration for His entrance, we too may be at rest; for His peace, like all which He is and has, is His that it may be ours.

The first requisite for peace is consciousness of harmonious and loving relations between me and God. The deepest secret of Christ's peace was His unbroken consciousness of unbroken communion with the Father, in which the Will submitted and the whole being of the man hung in filial dependence upon God. And the centre and foundation of all the peace-giving power of Jesus Christ is this, that in His death, by His one offering for sin for ever, He has swept away the occasion of antagonism, and so made peace between the twain, the Father in the heavens and the child, rebellious and prodigal, here below. Little as these disciples dreamed of it, the death impending, which was already beginning to cast its shadow over their souls, was the condition of securing to them and to us the true beginnings of all peace of

nature, the rectifying of our antagonistic relation to God, and the bringing Him and us into perfect concord.

My brother! no man can be at rest down to the very roots of His being, in the absence of the consciousness that he is at peace with God. There may be tumults of gladness, there may be much of stormy brightness in the life, but there cannot be the calm, still, impregnable, all-pervading and central tranquillity that our souls hunger for, unless we know and feel that we are right with God, and that there is nothing between us and Him. And it is because Jesus Christ, dying on the Cross, has made it possible for you and me to feel this, that He is our peace, and that He can say, "Peace I leave with you."

Another requisite is that we must be at peace with ourselves. There must be no stinging conscience, there must be no unsatisfied desires, there must be no inner schism between inclination and duty, reason and will, passion and judgment. There must be the quiet of a harmonized nature which has one object, one aim, one love; which—to use a very vulgar phrase—has "all its eggs in one basket," and has no contradictions running through its inmost self. There is only one way to get that peace—cleaving to Jesus Christ and making Him our Lord, our righteousness, our aim, our all. Your consciences will sting, and that destroys peace; or, if they do not sting, they will be torpid, and that destroys peace, for death is not peace. Unless we take Christ for our love, for the light of our minds, for the Sovereign Arbiter and Lord of our will, for the home of our desires, for the aim of our efforts, we shall never know what it is to

be at rest. Unsatisfied and hungry we shall go through life, seeking what nothing short of an Infinite Humanity can ever give us, and that is, a heart to lean our heads upon, an adequate object for all our faculties, and so a quiet satisfaction of all our desires. "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread?" A question that no man can answer without convicting himself of folly! There is One, and only One, who is enough for me, poor and weak and lowly and fleeting as I am, and as my earthly life is. Take that One for your Treasure, and you are rich indeed. The world without Christ is nought. Christ without the world is enough.

Nor is there any other way of healing the inner discord, schism, and contradiction of our anarchic nature, except in bringing it all into submission to His merciful rule. Look at that troubled kingdom that each of us carries about within himself, passion dragging this way, conscience that, a hundred desires all arrayed against one another, inclination here, duty there, till we are torn in pieces like a man drawn asunder by wild horses. And what is to be done with all that rebellious self, over which the poor soul rules as it may, and rules so poorly? Oh, there is an inner unrest, the necessary fate of every man who does not take Christ for his King. But when He enters the heart with His silken leash, the old fable comes true, and He binds the lions and the ravenous beasts there with its slender tie and leads them along, tamed, by the cord of love, and all harnessed to pull together in the chariot that He guides. There is only one way for a man to be at peace with himself through and through, and that is that he should put the guidance

of his life into the hands of Jesus Christ, and let Him do with it as He will.

There is one power, and only one, that can draw after it all the multitudinous heaped waters of the weltering ocean, and that is the quiet silver moon in the heavens, which pulls the tidal wave, into which melt and merge all currents and small breakers, and rolls it round the whole earth. And so Christ, shining down lambent and gentle, but changeless, from the darkest of our skies, will draw, in one great surge of harmonized motion, all the else contradictory currents of our stormy souls. "My peace I give unto you."

Another element in true tranquillity, which again is supplied only by Jesus Christ, is peace with men, "Whence come wars and fightings amongst you? From your lusts." Or, to translate the old-fashioned phraseology into modern English, the reason why men are in antagonism with one another is the central selfishness of each. And there is only one way by which men's relations can be thoroughly sweetened, and that is, by the Divine love of Jesus Christ pouring into their hearts, and casting out the devil of selfishness, and so blending them all into one harmonious whole.

The one basis of true, happy relations between man and man, without which there is not the all-round tranquillity that we require, lies in the common relation of all, if it may be, but certainly in the individual relation of myself, to Him who is the Lover and the Friend of all. And in the measure in which the law of the Spirit of Life which was in Jesus Christ is in me, in that measure do I find it possible

to reproduce His gentleness, sympathy, compassion, insight into men's sorrows, patience with men's offences, and all which makes, in our relations to one another, the harmony and the happiness of humanity.

Another of the elements or aspects of peace is peace with the outer world. "It is hard to kick against the pricks," but if you do not kick against them, they will not prick you. We beat ourselves all bruised and bleeding against the bars of the prison-house in trying to escape from it, but if we do not beat ourselves against them, they will not hurt us. If we do not want to get out of prison, it does not matter though we are locked in. And so it is not external calamities, but the resistance of the will to these, that makes the disturbances of life. Submission is peace, and when a man with Christ in his heart can say what Christ did, "Not My will, but Thine be done," oh! then, some faint beginnings, at least, of tranquillity come to the most agitated and buffeted; and, even in the depths of our sorrow, we may have a deeper depth of calm. If we have yielded ourselves to the Father's will, through that dear Son, who has set the example and communicates the power of filial obedience, then all winds blow us to our haven; "and all things work together for our good." And nothing "that is at enmity with joy" can break our settled peace.

Storms may break upon the rocky shore of our islanded lives, but deep in the centre there will be a secluded, inland dell "which heareth not the loud winds when they call," and where no tempest can ever reach. Peace may be ours in the midst of

warfare and of storms, for Christ with us reconciles us to God, harmonizes us with ourselves, brings us into amity with men, and makes the world all good.

II.—So, secondly, note here the world's gift, which is an illusion.

“Not as the world giveth give I unto you.” Our Lord contrasts, as it seems to me, primarily the manner of the world's bestowment, and then passes insensibly into a contrast between the character of the world's gifts and His own. That phrase “the world” may have a double sense. It may mean either mankind in general or the whole external and material frame of things. I think we may use both significations in elucidating the words before us.

Regarding it in the former of them, the thought is suggested—Christ *gives*; men can only *wish*. “Peace be unto you” comes from many a lip, and is addressed to many an ear, unfulfilled. Christ says “peace,” and His word is a conveyance. How little we can do for one another's tranquillity, how soon we come to the limits of human love and human help! How awful and impassable is the isolation in which each human soul lives! After all love and fellowship we dwell alone on our little island in the deep, separated by “the salt, unplumbed, estranging sea,” and we can do little more than hoist signals of goodwill, and now and then for a moment stretch our hands across the “echoing straits between.” But it is little after all that husband or wife can do for one another's central peace, little that the dearest friend can give. We have to depend upon ourselves and upon Christ for peace. That which the world wishes Christ gives.

And, then, if we take the other signification of the "world," and the other application of the whole promise, we may say—Outward things can give a man no real peace. The world is for excitement; Christ alone has the secret of tranquillity. It is as if to a man in a fever a physician should come and say: "I cannot give you anything to soothe you; here is a glass of brandy for you." That would not help the fever, would it? The world comes to us and says: "I cannot give you rest; here is a sharp excitement for you, more highly spiced and titillating for your tongue than the last one, which has turned flat and stale." That is about the best that it can do.

Oh! what a confession are the rush and recklessness, the fever and the fret of this nineteenth century, and of this great roaring, busy city in which we live! You go about our streets and look men in the face, and you see how all manner of hungry desires and eager wishes have imprinted themselves there. And now and then—how seldom!—you come across a face out of which beams a deep and settled peace. How many of you are there that dare not be quiet because then you are most troubled? How many of you are there that dare not reflect because then you are wretched? How many of you that are uncomfortable when alone, either because you are utterly vacuous, or because then you are surrounded by the ghosts of ugly thoughts that murder sleep and stuff every pillow with thorns? The world will bring you excitement; Christ, and Christ alone, will bring you rest.

The peace that earth gives is a poor affair at best. It is shallow; a very thin plating over a depth of

restlessness, like some skin of turf on a volcano, where a foot below the surface sulphurous fumes roll, and hellish turbulence seethes. That is the kind of rest that the world brings.

Oh, dear friends, there is nothing in this world that will fill and satisfy your hearts except only Jesus Christ. The world is for excitement; and Christ is the only real Giver of real peace.

III.—Lastly, note the duty of the recipients of that peace of Christ's: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The words that introduced this great discourse return again at its close, somewhat enlarged and with a deepened soothing and tenderness. There are two things referred to as the source of restlessness, troubled agitation or disturbance of heart; and that mainly, I suppose, because of terror in the outlook towards a dim and unknown future. The disciples are warned to fight against these if they would keep the gift of peace.

That is to say, casting the exhortation into a more general expression, Christ's gift of peace does not dispense with the necessity for our own effort after tranquillity. There is much in the outer world that will disturb us to the very end, and there is much within ourselves that will surge up and seek to shake our repose and break our peace; and we have to coerce and keep down the temptations to anxiety, the temptations to undue agitation of desire, the temptations to tumults of sorrow, the temptations to cowardly fears of the unknown future. All these will continue, even though we have Christ's peace in our hearts. And it is for us to see to it that we treasure the peace, "and

in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known unto God," that nothing may break the calm which we possess.

So, then, another thought arises from this final exhortation, and that is, that it is useless to tell a man, "Do not be troubled and do not be afraid," unless he first has Christ's peace as his. Is that peace yours, my brother, because Jesus Christ is yours? If so, then there is no reason for your being troubled or dreading any future. If it is not, you are mad not to be troubled, and you are insane if you are not afraid. The word for you is, "Be troubled, ye careless ones," for there is reason for it, and be afraid of that which is certainly coming.

The one thing that gives security and makes it possible to possess a calm heart is the possession of Jesus Christ by faith. Without Him it is a waste of breath to say to people, Do not be frightened, and it is wicked counsel to say to men, Be at ease. They ought to be terrified, and they ought to be troubled, and they will be some day, whether they think it or not.

And then the last thought from this exhortation is—and now I speak to Christian people—your imperfect possession of this peace is all your own fault.

Why, there are hundreds of professing Christian people who have some kind of faint, rudimentary faith, and there are many of them, I dare say, in this chapel this morning, who have no assured possession of any of these elements, of which I have been speaking, as the constituent parts of Christ's peace. You are *not* sure that you are right with God. You do *not* know what it is to have satisfied desires. You

do know what it is to have conflicting inclinations and impulses; you have envy and malice and hostility against men; and the world's storms and disasters do strike and disturb you. Why? Because you have not a firm grasp of Jesus Christ. "I have set the Lord always at my right hand, therefore I shall not be moved." There is the secret. Keep near Him, my brother; and then all things are fair and your heart is at peace.

I remember once standing by the side of a little Highland loch, on a calm autumn day, when all the winds were still, and every birch tree stood unmoved, and every twig reflected on the steadfast mirror, into the depths of which Heaven's own blue seemed to have found its way. That is what our hearts may be, if we let Christ put His guarding hand round them to keep the storms off, and have Him within us for our rest. But the man who does not trust Jesus is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but goes moaning round half the world, homeless and hungry, rolling and heaving, monotonous and yet changeful, salt and barren—the true emblem of every soul that has not listened to the merciful call, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."



XIV.

Joy and Faith, the Fruits of Christ's Departure.

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father : for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.”—JOHN xiv. 28, 29.



OUR Lord here casts a glance backward on the course of His previous words, and gathers together the substance and purpose of these. He brings out the intention of His warnings and the true effect of the departure, concerning which He had given them notice, as being twofold. In the first verse of my text His words about that going away, and the going away itself, are represented as the source of joy, which is an advance on the peace that He had just previously been promising. In the second of our verses these two things—His words, and the facts which they revealed—are represented as being the very ground and nourishment of faith.

So, then, we have these two thoughts to look at

now, the departed Lord, the fountain of joy to all who love Him; the departed Lord, the ground and food of faith.

I.—The departure of the Lord is a fountain of joy to those who love Him.

In the first part of our text the going away of Jesus is contemplated in two aspects.

The first is that with which we have already become familiar in previous sermons on this chapter—viz., its bearing upon the disciples; and in that respect, it is declared that Christ's going is Christ's coming.

But then we have a new aspect, one on which, in His sublime self-repression, He very seldom touches—viz., its bearing upon Himself; and in that aspect we are taught here to regard our Lord's going as ministering to His exaltation and joy, and therefore as being a source of joy to all His lovers.

So, then, we have these thoughts, Christ's going is Christ's coming, and Christ's going is Christ's exaltation, and for both reasons that departure ought to minister to His friends' gladness. Let us look at these three things for a little while.

First of all, there comes a renewed utterance of that great thought which runs through the whole chapter, that the departure of Jesus Christ is in reality the coming of Christ. The word "again" is a supplement, and somewhat restricts and destroys the true flow of thought and meaning of the words. For if we read, as our Authorised Version does, "I go away and come again unto you," we are inevitably led to think of a coming, separated by a considerable distance of time from the departure. And for

most of us that which is suggested is the final coming and return, in bodily form, of the Lord Jesus.

Now, great and glorious as that hope is, it is too far away to be in itself a sufficient comfort to the mourning disciples, and too remote to be for us, if taken alone, a sufficient ground of joy and of rest. But if you strike out that intrusive word "*again*," and read the sentence as being what it is, a description of one continuous process, of which the parts are so closely connected as to be all but contemporaneous, you get the true idea. "I go away, and I come to you." There is no gap, the thing runs on without a break. There is no moment of absolute absence; there are not two motions, one from us and the other back again towards us, but all is one. The "going" is the "coming"; the solemn series of events which began on Calvary, and ended on Olivet, to the eye of sense were successive stages in the departure of Jesus Christ. But looked at with a deeper understanding of their true meaning, they are successive stages in His approach towards us. His death, His resurrection, His ascension, were not steps in the cessation of His presence, but they were simply steps in the transition from a lower to a higher kind of that presence. He changed the limitations and externalities of a mere bodily, local nearness for the realities of a spiritual presence. To the eye of sense, the "going away" was the reality, and the "coming" a metaphor. To the eye enlightened to see things as they are, the dropping away of the visible corporeal was but the inauguration of the higher and the more real. And we need to reverse our notions of what is real and what is figurative in Christ's presence, and to feel

that that form of His presence which we may all have to-day is far more real than the form which ceased, when the Shekinah cloud "received Him out of their sight," before we can penetrate to the depth of His words, or grasp the whole fulness of blessing and of consolation which lie in them here. In a very deep and real sense, "He departed from us for a season that we might receive Him for ever."

The real presence of Jesus Christ to-day, and through the long ages with every waiting heart, is the very key-note to the solemn music of these chapters. And, again, I press upon you, and upon myself, the question, Do we believe it? Do we live in the faith of it? Does it fill the same place in the perspective of our Christian creed as it does in the revelation of the Scripture, or have we refined it and watered it down, until it comes to be little more than merely the continuous influence of the record of His past, just as any great and sovereign spirit that has influenced mankind may still "rule the nations from his urn"? Or do we take Him at His word and believe that He meant what He said, in something far other than a violent figure for the continuance of His influence, and of the inspiration drawn from Him, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"? "Say not in Thine heart, Who shall ascend up into heaven?—that is, to bring Christ down again from above—the Word," the Incarnate Word, "is nigh thee, in thy heart," if thou lovest and trustest Him.

Then, again, the other aspect of our Lord's coming, which is emphasized here, is that in which it is

regarded as affecting Himself. Christ's going is Christ's exaltation.

Now observe that, in the first clause of our verse, there is simply specified the fact of departure, without any reference to the "whither"; because all that was wanted was to contrast the going and the coming. But, in this second clause, in which the emphasis rests not so much upon the fact of departure as upon the goal to which He went, we read: "*I go to the Father.*" Hitherto we have been contemplating Christ's departure simply in its bearing upon us, but here, with exquisite tenderness, He unveils another aspect of it, and that in order that He may change His disciples' sadness into joy; and says to them, "If you were not so absorbed in yourselves, you would have a thought to spare about Me, and you would feel that you should be glad because I am about to be exalted."

Very, very seldom does He open such a glimpse into His heart, and it is all the more tender and impressive when He does. What a hint of the continual self-sacrifice of the human life of Jesus Christ lies in this thought, that He bids His disciples rejoice with Him, because the time is getting nearer its end, and He goes back to the Father! And what shall we say of the nature of Him to whom it was martyrdom to live, and a supreme instance of self-sacrificing humiliation to be "found in fashion as a man"?

He tells His followers here that the reason for their joy in His departure is to be found in this fact, that He goes to the Father, who is greater than Himself.

Now mark, with regard to that remarkable utterance, that the whole course of thought in the context

requires, as it seems to me, that we should suppose that for Christ to go to the Father was to share in the Father's greatness. Why else should the disciples be bidden to rejoice in it? or why should He say anything about the greatness of the Father at all? If so, then this follows, that the greatness to which He here alludes is such as He enters by His ascension. Or, in other words, that the inferiority, of whatever nature it may be, to which He here alludes, falls away when He passes hence.

Now these words are often quoted triumphantly, as if they were dead against what I venture to call the orthodox and Scriptural doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it may be worth while to remark that that doctrine accepts this as fully as it does Christ's other word, "I and My Father are one." I venture to think that it is the only construction of Scripture phrasology which does full justice to all the elements. But be that as it may, I want to remind you that the creed which confesses the unity of the Godhead and the Divinity of Jesus Christ is not to be overthrown by pelting this verse at it; for this verse is part of that creed, which as fully declares that the Father is greater than the Son, as it declares that the Son is One with the Father. You may be satisfied with it or no, but as a matter of simple honesty it must be recognized that the creed of the Catholic Church does combine both the elements of these representations.

Now, we can only speak in this matter as Scripture guides us. The depths of Deity are far too deep to be sounded by our plummets. And he is a bold man who ventures to say that he knows what is impossible

in reference to the Divine nature. He need to have gone all round God, and down to the depths, and up to the heights of a bottomless and summitless infinitude, before he has a right to say that. But let me remind you that we can dimly see that the very names "Father" and "Son" do imply some sort of subordination, but that that subordination, inasmuch as it is in the timeless and inward relations of Divinity, must be supposed to exist after the Ascension, as it existed before the Incarnation ; and, therefore, any such mysterious difference is not that which is referred to here. What is referred to is what dropped away from the Man Jesus Christ, when He ascended up on high. As Luther has it, in his strong, simple way, in one of his sermons, "Here He was a poor, sad, suffering Christ"; and that garb of lowliness falls from Him, like the mantle that fell from the prophet as he went up in the chariot of fire, when He passes behind the brightness of the Shekinah cloud that hides Him from our sight. That in which the Father was greater than He, in so far as our present purpose is concerned, was that which He left behind when He ascended, even the pain, the suffering, the sorrow, the restrictions, the humiliation, that made so much of the burden of His life. Therefore, we, as His followers, have to rejoice in an ascended Christ, beneath whose feet are foes, and far away from whose human personality are all the ills that flesh is heir to. "If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice that I said, I go to the Father, for My Father is greater than I."

So the third thought, in this first part of our subject, is that on both these grounds Christ's ascension and departure is a source of joy. The two

aspects of His departure, as affecting Him and as affecting us, are inseparably welded together. There can be no presence with us, man by man, through all the ages, and in every land, unless He whose presence it is, participates in the absolute glory of Divinity. For to be with you and me and all our suffering brethren, through the centuries and over the world, involves something more than belongs to mere humanity. Therefore, the two sources of gladness are confluent—Christ's ascension as affecting us is inseparably woven up with Christ's ascension as affecting Himself.

Love will delight to dwell upon that thought of its exalted lover. We may fairly apply the simplicity of human relationships and affections to the elucidation of what ought to be our affection to Him, our Lord. And surely if our dearest one were far away from us, in some lofty position, our hearts and our thoughts would ever be going thither, and we should live more there than here, where we are "cribbed, cabined, and confined." And if we love Jesus Christ with any depth of earnestness and fervour of affection, there will be no thought more sweet to us, and none which will more naturally flow into our hearts, whenever they are for a moment at leisure, than this, the thought of Him, our brother and forerunner, who has ascended up on high; and in the midst of the glory of the throne bears us in his Heart, and uses His glory for our blessing. Love will spring to where the beloved is, and if we be Christians in any deep and real sense, our hearts will have risen with Christ, and we shall be sitting with Him at the right hand of God. My brother, measure your Christianity, and

the reality of your love to Jesus Christ, by this. Is it to you natural, and a joy, to turn to Him, and ever to make present to your mind the glories in which He loves and lives, and intercedes, and reigns, for you? "If ye love Me, ye will rejoice, because I go unto the Father."

II.—And now I can deal with the second verse of our text very briefly. For our purpose is less important than the former one. In it we find our Lord setting forth, secondly, His departure and His announcement of His departure as the ground and food of faith.

He knew what a crash was coming, and with exquisite tenderness, gentleness, knowledge of their necessities, and suppression of all His own feelings and emotions, He gave Himself to prepare the disciples for the storm, that, forewarned, they might be forearmed, and that, when it did burst upon them, it might not take them by surprise.

So He does still, about a great many other things besides, and tells us beforehand of what is sure to come to us, that when we are caught in the midst of the tempest we may not bate one jot of heart or hope.

Why should I complain
Of want or distress,
Temptation or pain?
He told me no less.

And when my sorrows come to me, I may say about them what He says about His departure. He has told us before, that when it comes we may believe.

But note how, in these final words of my text,

Christ avows that the great aim of His utterances and of His departure is to evoke our faith. And what does He mean by faith? He means, first of all, a grasp of the historic facts—His death, His resurrection, His ascension. He means, next, the understanding of these as He Himself has explained them—a death of sacrifice, a resurrection of victory over death and the grave, and an ascension to rule and guide His Church and the world, and to send His Divine Spirit into men's hearts if they will receive it. And He means, therefore, as the essence of the faith that He would produce in all our hearts—a reliance upon Himself as thus revealed, Sacrifice by His death, Victor by His resurrection, King and interceding Priest by His ascension—a reliance upon Himself as absolute as the facts are sure, as unfaltering as His eternal sameness. The faith that grasps the Christ, dead, risen, ascended, as its all in all, for time and for eternity, is the faith which by all His work, and by all His words about His work, He desires to kindle in our hearts. Has He kindled it in yours?

Then there is a second thought—viz., that these facts, as interpreted by Himself, are the ground and the nourishment of our faith. How differently they looked when seen from the further side and when seen from the hither side! Anticipated and dimly anticipated, they were all doleful and full of dismay; remembered and looked back upon, they were radiant and bright. The disciples felt, with shrinking hearts and fainting spirits, that their whole reliance upon Jesus Christ was on the point of being shattered, and that everything was going when He died. "*We trusted,*" said two of them, with such a sad use of the past

tense, "we *trusted* that this *had been* He which should have redeemed Israel. But we do not trust it any more," nor do we expect Him to be Israel's Redeemer now. But after the facts were all unveiled, there came back the memory of His words, and they said to one another, "Did He not tell us that it was all to be so? How blind we were not to understand Him!"

And so the cross, the grave, the skies, are the foundations of our faith; and they who see Him dying, rising, ascended, henceforth will find it impossible to doubt. Feed your faith upon these great facts, and take Christ's own explanation of them, and your faith will be strong.

Again, we learn here that faith is the condition of the true presence of our absent Lord. Faith is that on our side which corresponds to His spiritual coming to us. Whosoever trusts Him possesses Him, and He is with and in every soul that, loving Him, relies upon Him, in a closeness so close and a presence so real that heaven itself does not bring the spirit of the believer and the Spirit of the Lord nearer one another, though it takes away the bodily film that sometimes seems to part their lives.

We, too, may and should be glad when we lift our eyes to that Throne where our Brother reigns. We, too, may be glad that He is there, because His being there is the reason why He can be here; and we, too, may feed our faith upon Him, and so bring Him in very deed to dwell in our hearts. If we would have Christ within us, let us trust Him dying, rising, living in the heavens; and then we shall learn how, by all three apparent departures, He is drawing the closer to the souls that love and trust.

How Christ Anticipated His Passion.

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you : for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father ; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise ! Let us go hence.”—
JOHN xiv. 30, 31.



THE summons to departure which closes these verses shows that we have now reached the end of that sacred hour in the upper room. In obedience to the summons, we have to fancy the little group leaving its safe shelter, as sailors might put out from behind a breakwater into a stormy sea. They pass from its seclusion and peace into the joyous stir of the crowded streets, filled with feast-keeping multitudes, on whom the full paschal moon looked down, pure and calming. Somewhere between the upper chamber and the crossing of the brook Kedron, the Divine words of the following chapters were spoken, but this discourse, closely connected as it is with them, reaches its fitting close in these penetrating, solemn words of outlook into the near future, so calm, so weighty, so resolute, so almost triumphant,

with which Christ seeks finally to impart to His timorous friends some of His own peace and assurance of victory.

They lead us into a region seldom opened to our view, and never to be looked upon but with reverent awe. For they tell us what Christ thought about His sufferings, and how He felt as He went down to that cold, black river, in which He was to be baptized. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground."

So, reverently listening to the words, sacred because of the Speaker, the theme, and the circumstances, we note in them these things: His calm anticipation of the assailant, His unveiling of the secret and motive of His apparent defeat, and His resolute advance to the conflict. Let us look at these three points.

I.—First, we have here our Lord's calm anticipation of the assailant: "Hereafter I will not speak much with you: for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me."

One of the other Gospels tells us, in finishing its account of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, that when Satan had ended all these temptations "he departed from Him for a season." And now we have the second and the intenser form of that assault. The first was addressed to desires, and sought to stimulate ambition and ostentation and the animal appetites, and so, through the cravings of human nature, to shake the Master's fixed faith. The second used sharper and more fatal weapons, and appealed, not to desire of enjoyment, or ease, or good, but to the natural, human shrinking from pain and

suffering and shame and death. He that was impervious on the side of natural necessities and more subtle spiritual desires might yet be reached through terror. And so the second form of the assault, instead of tempting the traveller to cast aside his cloak by the sunshine, tempted him to fling it aside by storm and tempest; and the one, as the other, was doomed to failure.

Note how the Master, with that clear eye which saw to the depths as well as the heights, and before which men and things were but, as it were, the transparent *media* through which unseen spiritual powers wrought, just as He discerns the Father's will as supreme and sovereign, sees here—beneath Judas' treachery, and Pharisees' and priests' envy, and people's stolid indifference, and the Roman soldiers' impartial scorn—the workings of a personal source and centre of all. The "Prince of this world," who rules men and things when they are severed from God, "cometh." Christ's sensitive nature apprehends the approach of the evil thing, as some organisations can tell when the thunder-storm is about to burst. His Divine Omniscience, working, as it did, even within the limits of humanity, knows not only when the storm is about to burst upon Him, but knows who it is that has raised the tempest. And so He says, "The Prince of this world cometh."

But note, as yet more important, that tremendous and unique consciousness of absolute invulnerability against the assaults. "He hath nothing in Me." He is "the Prince of the world but His dominion stops outside My breast. He has no rule or authority there. His writs do not run, nor

is His dominion recognized, within that sacred realm."

Was there ever a man that could say that? Are there any of us, the purest and the noblest, who, standing single-handed in front of the antagonistic power of evil, and believing it to be consolidated and concentrated in a person, dare to profess that there is not a thing in us on which he can lay his black claw and say—"That is mine"? Is there nothing inflammable within us which the "fiery darts of the wicked" can kindle? Are there any of us who bar our doors so tightly as that we can say that none of his seductions will find their way therein, and that nothing there will respond to them? Christ sets Himself here against the whole embattled and embodied power of evil, and puts Himself in contrast to the universal human experience, when He calmly declares "He hath nothing in Me."

It is an assertion of His absolute freedom from sinfulness, and it involves, as I take it, the other assertion—that as He is free from sin, so He is not subject to that consequence of sin, which is death, as we know it.

Another part of Scripture speaks to us in strange language, which yet has in it a deep truth, of "him that had the power of death, that is the devil." Men fall under the rightful dominion of the king of evil when they sin, and part of the proof of his dominion is the fact of physical death, with its present accompaniments.

Thus, in His calm anticipation, Jesus stands waiting for the enemy's charge, knowing that all its force will be broken against the serried ranks of His immaculate

purity, and that He will come from the dreadful close unwounded all, and triumphant for evermore.

But do not let us suppose that because Christ, in His anticipation of suffering and death, knew Himself invulnerable, with not even a spot on His heel into which the arrow could go, therefore the conflict was an unreal or shadowy one. It was a true fight, and it was a real struggle that He was anticipating, in these solemn words, thus calmly as knowing Himself the victor ere He entered on the dreadful field.

II.—So note, secondly, in these words, our Lord's unveiling of the motive and aim of His apparent defeat. "But that the world might know that I love the Father, and, as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do."

There may be some uncertainty about the exact grammatical relation of these clauses to one another, with which I need not trouble you, because it does not affect their substantial meaning. However we solve the mere grammatical questions, the fundamental significance of the whole remains unaffected, and it is this: that Christ's sufferings and death were, in one aspect, for the purpose that the world might know His love to the Father, and, in another aspect, were obedience to the Father's commandment. And if we regard these two things, I think we shall get some thoughts worth considering as to the way in which the Master Himself looks upon these sufferings and that death.

The first thing I note in this division of my discourse is, that Christ would have us regard His sufferings and His death as His own act. Note that strange word "*thus I do.*" A strange word to be used

in such a connection, but full of profound meaning. We speak, and rightly, of the solemn events of these coming days as the *passion* of our Lord, but they were His *action* quite as much as His *passion*. He was no mere passive sufferer. In them all He acted, or, as He says here, we may look upon them all, not as things inflicted upon Him from without by any power, however it might seem to have the absolute control of His fate, but as things which He did Himself.

There is one Man who died, not of physical necessity, but because of free choice. There is one Man who chose to be born, and who chose to die; who, in His choosing to be born, chose humiliation, and who, in His choosing to die, chose yet deeper humiliation. This sacrifice was a voluntary sacrifice, or, to speak more accurately, He was both Priest and Sacrifice, when "through the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot unto God." The living Christ is the Lord of Life, and lives because He will; the dying Christ is the Lord of Death, and dies because He chose. He would have us learn that all His bitter sufferings, inflicted from without as they were, and traceable to a deeper source than merely human antagonism, were also self-inflicted and self-chosen, and further traceable to the Father's will in harmony with His own. "Thus I do," and thus He did when He died.

Then, further, our Lord would have us regard these sufferings and that death as being His crowning act of obedience to His Father's will. That is in accordance with the whole tone of His self-consciousness, especially as set before us in this precious Gospel of John, which traces up everything to the submission of

the Divine Son to the Divine Father, a submission which is no mere external thing, but results from, and is the expression of the absolute unity of will and the perfect oneness of mutual love. And so, because He loved the Father, therefore He came to do the Father's will, and the crowning act of His obedience was this, that He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. It was a voluntary sacrifice, but that voluntariness was not self-will. It was a sacrifice in obedience to the Father's will, but that obedience was not reluctant. Christ was the embodiment of the Divine purpose, formed before the ages, realized in time, when He bowed His head and yielded up the ghost. The highest proof of His filial obedience was the Cross. And to it He points us, if we would know what it is to love and obey the Father.

Now it is to be noticed that this motive of our Lord's death is not the usual one given in the Scripture. And I can suppose the question being put, "Why did not Jesus Christ say, in that supreme moment, that He went to the Cross because of His love to us rather than because of His love to the Father?" But I think the answer is not far to seek. There are several satisfactory ones which may be given. One is that this making prominent of His love to God rather than to us, as the motive for His death, is in accordance with that comparative reticence on the part of Jesus as to the atoning aspect of His death, which I have had frequent occasion to point out, and which does not carry in it the implication that that doctrine was a new thing in the Christian preaching after Pentecost. Another reason may be drawn from the whole strain and tone of this chapter,

which, as I have already said, traces up everything to the loving relations of obedience between the Father and Son. And yet another reason may be given in that the very statement of Christ's love to God, and loving obedience to the Father's commandment as the motive of His death, includes in it necessarily the other thing—love to us. For, what was the Father's commandment which Christ with all His heart accepted, and with His glad will obeyed unto death? It was that the Son should come as the Ransom for the world. "The Son of man was sent, not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a Ransom for many." Or, as He Himself said, in one of His earliest discourses, "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." And for what He sent that Son is clearly stated in the context itself of that passage. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

To speak of Christ's acceptance of the Father's commandment, then, is but another way of saying that Christ, in all the fulness of His self-surrender, entered into and took as His own the great, eternal, Divine purpose, that the world should be redeemed by His death upon the Cross. The heavenward side of His love to man is His love to the Father, God.

Now there is another aspect still in which our Lord would here have us regard His sufferings and death, and that is that they are of world-wide significance.

Think for a moment of the obscurity of the speaker—a Jewish peasant in an upper room, with a handful of poor men round Him, all of them ready to forsake

Him, within a few hours of His ignominious death, and yet He says, "I am about to die, that the echo of it may reverberate through the whole world." He puts Himself forth as of world-wide significance, and His death as adapted to move mankind, and as one day to be known all over the world. There is nothing in history to approach to the gigantic arrogance of Jesus Christ, and it is only explicable on the ground of His Divinity. "This I do that *the world* may know."

And what did it matter to the world? Why should it be of any importance that the world should know? For one plain reason, because true knowledge of the true nature and motive of that death breaks the dominion of the Prince of the world, and sets men free from his tyranny. Emancipation, hope, victory, purity, the passing from the tyranny of the darkness into the blessed kingdom of the light—all depend on the world's knowing that Christ's death was His own voluntary act of submission to the infinite love and will of the Father, which will and love He made His own, and therefore died, the sacrifice for the world's sin.

The enemy was approaching. He was to be hoist with his own petard. "He digged a pit;" he digged it deep, and into the pit which he digged, he himself fell. "Oh! death, I will be thy plague" by entering into thy realm. "Oh! grave, I will be thy destruction" by dwelling for a moment within thy dark portals and rending them irreparably as I pass from them. The Prince of this world was defeated when he seemed to triumph, and Christ's mighty words came true: "Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out." He would

have the world know—with the knowledge which is of the heart as well as the head, which is life as well as understanding—which is possession and appropriation, the mystery, the meaning, the motive of His death, because the world thereby ceases to be a world, and becomes the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

III.—Lastly, notice here the resolute advance to the conflict.

“Arise! Let us go hence”—a word of swift alacrity. Evidently He started to His feet whilst they lay round the table. He bids them rise with Him and follow Him on the path.

But there is more in the words than a mere close of a conversation, and a summons to change of place. They indicate a kind of Divine impatience to be in the fight, and to have it over. The same emotion is plainly revealed in the whole of the latter days of our Lord's life. You remember how His disciples followed amazed, as He strode up the road from Jericho, hastening to His Cross. You remember His deliberate purpose to draw upon Himself public notice during that dangerous and explosive week before the Passover, as shown in the publicity of His entry into Jerusalem, His sharp rebukes of the rulers in the Temple, and in every other incident of those days. You remember His words to the betrayer, “That thou doest, do quickly.” These latter hours of the Lord were strongly marked by the emotion to which He gave utterance in His earlier words: “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Perhaps that feeling indicated His human shrinking; for we all know how we sometimes are glad to precipitate an unwelcome thing, and how,

the more we dread it, the more we are anxious to get it over. But there was far more than that in it. There was the resolved determination to carry out the Father's purpose for the world's salvation, which was His own purpose, and was none the less His though He knew all the suffering which it involved.

Let us adore that steadfast will, which never faltered, though the natural human weakness was there too, and which, as impelled by some strong spring, kept persistently pressing towards the Cross that on it He might die, the world's Redeemer.

And do not let us forget that He summoned His lovers and friends to follow Him on the road. "*Let us go hence.*" It is ours to take up our cross daily and follow the Master, to do with persistent resolve our duty, whether it be welcome or unwelcome, and to see to it that we plant no faltering nor reluctant foot in our Master's footsteps. For us, too, if we have learned to flee to that Cross for our redemption and salvation, the resolve of our Redeemer and the very passion of the Saviour itself become the pattern and the law of our lives. We, too, have to cast ourselves into the fight, and to take our cross, that the world may know that we love the Father, and as the Father hath given us commandment. And if so we live, then our death, too, in some humble measure, may be like His—the crowning act of obedience to the Father's will; in which we are neither passively nor resistingly dragged under by a force that we cannot effectually resist, but in which we go down willingly into the dark valley, where death "*makes our sacrifice complete.*"

The True Vine.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me."—JOHN xv. 1—4.



THAT suggested this lovely parable of the vine and the branches is equally unimportant and undiscoverable. Many guesses have been made, and, no doubt, as was the case with almost all our Lord's parables, some external object gave occasion for it. It is a significant token of our Lord's calm collectedness, even at that supreme and heart-shaking moment, that He should have been at leisure to observe, and to use for His purposes of teaching, something that was present at the instant. The deep and solemn lessons which He draws, perhaps from some vine by the wayside, are the richest and sweetest clusters that the vine has ever grown. The great truth in this chapter, applied in manifold directions, and viewed in many aspects, is that of the living union

between Christ and those who believe on Him. And the parable of the vine and the branches affords the foundation for all which follows.

We take the first half of that parable this morning. It is somewhat difficult to trace the course of thought in it, but there seems to be, first of all, the similitude set forth, without explanation or interpretation, in its most general terms, and then various aspects in which its applications to Christian duty are taken up and reiterated. I simply follow the words which I have read for my text.

I.—We have, then, first, the vine in the vital unity of all its parts.

“I am the true vine,” of which the material one to which He points is but a shadow and an emblem. The reality lies in Him. We shall best understand the deep significance and beauty of this thought if we recur in imagination to some of those great vines which we sometimes see in royal conservatories, where for hundreds of yards the pliant branches stretch along the espaliers, and yet one life pervades the whole, from the root, through the crooked stem, right away to the last leaf at the top of the furthest branch, and reddens and mellows every cluster. So, says Christ, Between Me and the totality of them that hold by Me in faith there is one life, passing ever from root, through branches, and ever bearing fruit.

Let me remind you that this great thought of the unity of life between Jesus Christ and all that believe upon Him is the familiar teaching of Scripture, and is set forth by other emblems besides that of the vine, the queen of the vegetable world ; for we have it in the metaphor of the body and its members, where not

only are the many members declared to be parts of one body, but the name of the collective body, made up of many members, is Christ. "So also is"—not, as we might expect, the Church, but—"Christ," the whole bearing the name of Him who is the source of life to every part. Personality remains, individuality remains: I am I, and He is He, and thou art thou; but across the awful gulf of the individual consciousness, which parts us from one another, Jesus Christ assumes the Divine prerogative of passing and joining Himself to each of us, if we love Him and trust Him, in a union so close, and with a communication of life so real, that every other union which we know is but a faint and far-off adumbration of it. A oneness of life from root to branch, which is the sole cause of fruitfulness and growth, is taught us here.

And then let me remind you that that living unity between Jesus Christ and all who love Him is a oneness which necessarily results in oneness of relation to God and men, in oneness of character, and in oneness of destiny. In relation to God He is the Son, and we in Him receive the standing of sons. He has access ever into the Father's presence, and we through Him and in Him have access with confidence and are accepted in the Beloved. In relation to men, if He be Light, we, touched with His light, are also, in our measure and degree, the lights of the world; and in the proportion in which we receive into our souls, by patient abiding in Jesus Christ, the very power of His Spirit, we, too, become God's anointed, subordinately but truly His Messiahs, for He Himself says: "As the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you."

In regard of character, the living union between

Christ and His members results in a similarity if not identity of character, and with His righteousness we are clothed, and by that righteousness we are justified, and by that righteousness we are sanctified. The oneness between Christ and His children is the ground at once of their forgiveness and acceptance, and of all virtue and nobleness of life and conduct that can ever be theirs.

And, in like manner, we can look forward and be sure that we are so closely joined with Him, if we love Him and trust Him, that it is impossible but that where He is there shall also His servants be; and that what He is that shall also His servant be. For the oneness of life, by which we are delivered from the bondage of corruption and the law of sin and death here, will never halt nor cease until it brings us into the unity of His glory, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And as He sits on the Father's throne, His children must needs sit with Him, on His throne.

Therefore, the name of the collective whole, of which the individual Christian is part, is Christ. And as in the great Old Testament prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, the figure that rises before Isaiah's vision fluctuates between that which is clearly the collective Israel and that which is, as clearly, the personal Messiah; so the "Christ" is not only the individual Redeemer who bears the body of the flesh literally here upon earth, but the whole of that redeemed Church, of which it is said, "it is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

II.—Now note, secondly, the husbandman, and the dressing of the vine.

The one tool that a vinedresser needs is a knife. The chief secret of culture is merciless pruning. And so says my text, "the Father is the husbandman." Our Lord assumes that office in other of His parables. But here the exigencies of the parabolic form require that the office of Cultivator should be assigned only to the Father; although we are not to forget that the Father, in that office, works through and in His Son.

But we should note that the one kind of husbandry spoken of here is pruning—not manuring, not digging, but simply the hacking away of all that is rank and all that is dead.

Were you ever in a greenhouse or in a vineyard at the season of cutting back the vines? What flagitious waste it would seem to an ignorant person to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the incipient clusters, and to look up at the bare stem, bleeding at a hundred points from the sharp steel. Yes! But there was not a random stroke in it all, and there was nothing cut away which it was not loss to keep and gain to lose; and it was all done artistically, scientifically, for a set purpose—that the plant might bring forth more fruit.

Thus, says Christ, the main thing that is needed—not, indeed, to improve the life in the branches, but to improve the branches in which the life is—is excision. There are two forms of it given here—absolutely dead wood has to be cut out; wood that has life in it, but which has also rank shoots, that do not come from the all-pervading and hallowed life, has to be pruned back and deprived of its shoots.

It seems to me that the very language of the metaphor before us requires us to interpret the fruitless branches as meaning all those who have a mere superficial, external adherence to the true vine. For, according to the whole teaching of the parable, if there be any real union, there will be some life, and if there be any life, there will be some fruit, and, therefore, the branch that has no fruit has no life, because it has no real union. And so the application, as I take it, is necessarily to those professing Christians, nominal adherents to Christianity or to Christ's Church, people that come to church and chapel, and if you ask them to put down in the census paper what they are, will say that they are Christians—Churchmen, or Dissenters, as the case may be—but who have no real hold upon Jesus Christ, and no real reception of anything from Him; and the "taking away" is simply that, somehow or other, God makes visible, what is a fact, that they do not belong to Him with whom they have this nominal connection.

The longer Christianity continues in any country, the more does the Church get weighted and lowered in its temperature by the aggregation round about it of people of that sort. And one sometimes longs and prays for a storm to come, of some sort or other, to blow the dead wood out of the tree, and to get rid of all this oppressive and stifling weight of sham Christians that has come round every one of our churches. "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor," and every man that has any reality of Christian life in him should pray that this pruning and cutting out of the dead wood may

be done, and that He would "come as a refiner's fire and purify" His priesthood.

Then there is the other side, the pruning of the fruitful branches. We all, in our Christian life, carry with us the two natures—our own poor, miserable selves, and the better life of Jesus Christ within us. The one flourishes at the expense of the other; and it is the Husbandman's merciful, though painful work, to cut back unsparingly the rank shoots that come from self, in order that all the force of our lives may be flung into the growing of the cluster which is acceptable to Him.

So, dear friends, let us understand the meaning of all that comes to us. The knife is sharp and the tendrils bleed, and things that seem very beautiful and very precious are unsparingly shorn away, and we are left bare, and, as it seems to ourselves, impoverished. But oh! it is all sent that we may fling our force into the production of fruit unto God. And no stroke will be a stroke too many or too deep if it helps us to that. Only let us take care that we do not let regrets for the vanished good harm us just as much as joy in the present good did, and let us rather, in humble submission of will to His merciful knife, say to Him, "Cut to the quick, Lord, if only thereby my fruit unto Thee may increase."

III.—Lastly, we have here the branches abiding in the vine, and therefore fruitful.

Our Lord deals with the little group of His disciples as incipiently and imperfectly, but really, cleansed through "the word which He has spoken to them," and gives them the exhortation towards that conduct through which the cleansing and the union and the

fruitfulness will all be secured. "Now ye are clean, abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me."

Union with Christ is the condition of all fruitfulness. There may be plenty of activity and yet barrenness. Works are not fruit. We can bring forth a great deal "of ourselves," and because it is of ourselves it is naught. Fruit is possible only on condition of union with Him. He is the productive source of it all.

There is the great glory and distinctive blessedness of the Gospel. Other teachers come to us and tell us how we ought to live, and give us laws, patterns, and examples, reasons, and motives for pure and noble lives. The Gospel comes and gives us life, if we will take it, and unfolds itself in us into all the virtues that we have to possess. What is the use of giving a man a copy if he cannot copy it? Morality comes and stands over the cripple, and says to him, "Look here! This is how you ought to walk." And he lies there, paralyzed and crippled, after as before the exhibition of what graceful progression is. But Christianity comes and bends over him, and lays hold of his hand, and says, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And his feet and ankle bones receive strength, and "he leaps, and walks, and praises God." Christ gives more than commandments, patterns, motives; He gives the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly, and in Him alone is that power to be found.

Then, note that our reception of that power depends upon our own efforts. "Abide in Me and I in you."

Is that last clause a commandment as well as the first? How can His abiding in us be a duty incumbent upon us? But it is. And we might paraphrase the intention of this imperative in its two halves, by—Do you take care that you abide in Christ, and that Christ abides in you. The two ideas are but two sides of the one great sphere; they complement and do not contradict each other. We dwell in Him as the part does in the whole, as the branch does in the vine, recipient of its life and fruit-bearing energy. He dwells in us as the whole does in the part, as the vine dwells in the branch, communicating its energy to every part; or as the soul does in the body, being alive equally in every part, though it be sight in the eyeball, and hearing in the ear, and colour in the cheek, and strength in the hand, and swiftness in the foot.

“Abide in Me and I in you.” So we come down to very plain practical exhortations. Dear brethren, suppress yourselves, and empty your lives of self, that the life of Christ may come in. A lock upon a canal, if it is empty, will have its gates pressed open by the water in the canal and will be filled. Empty the heart and Christ will come in. “Abide in Him” by continual direction of thought, love, desire to Him; by continual and reiterated submission of the will to Him, as commanding and as appointing; by the honest reference to Him of daily life and all petty duties which otherwise distract us and draw us away from Him. Then, dwelling in Him we shall share in His life, and shall bring forth fruit to His praise.

Here is encouragement for us all. To all of us, sometimes, our lives seem barren and poor; and we

feel as if we had brought forth no fruit to perfection. Let us get nearer to Him and He will see to the fruit. Some poor stranded sea-creature on the beach, floundering in the pools vainly, is at the point of death ; but the great tide comes, leaping and rushing over the sands, and bears it away out into the middle deeps for renewed activity and joyous life. Let the flood of Christ's life bear you on its bosom, and you will rejoice and expatiate therein.

Here is a lesson of solemn warning to professing Christians. The lofty mysticism of inward life in Jesus Christ all terminates at last in simple practical obedience ; and the fruit is the test of the life. "Depart from Me, I never knew you, ye that work iniquity."

And here is a lesson of solemn appeal to us all. Our only possibility of bearing any fruit worthy of our natures and of God's purpose concerning us is by vital union with Jesus Christ. If we have not that, there may be plenty of activity and mountains of work in our lives, but there will be no fruit. Only that is fruit which pleases God and is conformed to His purpose concerning us, and all the rest of your busy doings is no more the fruit a man should bear than cankers are roses, or than oak-galls are acorns. They are but the work of a creeping grub, and diseased excrescences that suck into themselves the juices that should swell the fruit. Open your hearts to Christ and let His life and His Spirit come into you, and then you will "have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

XVII.

The True Branches of the True Vine.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be My disciples.”—JOHN xv. 5—8.



O wise teacher is ever afraid of repeating himself. The average mind requires the reiteration of truth before it can make that truth its own. One coat of paint is not enough, it soon rubs off. Especially is this true in regard of lofty spiritual and religious truth, remote from men's ordinary thinkings, and in some senses unwelcome to them. So our Lord, the great Teacher, never shrank from repeating His lessons when He saw that they were but partially apprehended. It was not grievous to Him to say the same things, because for them it was safe. He broke the bread of life into small pieces, and fed them little and often.

So here, in the verses that we have to consider now, we have the repetition, and yet not the mere repetition, of the great parable of the vine, as teaching the union of Christians with Christ, and their consequent fruitfulness. He saw, no doubt, that the truth was but partially dawning upon His disciples' minds. Therefore, He said it all over again, with deepened meaning, following it out into new applications, presenting further consequences, and, above all, giving it a more sharp and definite personal application.

Are we any swifter scholars than these first ones? X
Have we absorbed into our own thinking this truth so thoroughly and constantly, and wrought it out in our lives so completely, that we do not need to be reminded of it any more? Shall we not be wise if we faithfully listen to His repeated teachings?

The verses which I have read give us four aspects of this great truth of union with Jesus Christ; or of its converse, separation from Him. There is, first, the fruitfulness of union; second, the withering and destruction of separation; third, the satisfaction of desire which comes from abiding in Christ; and, lastly, the great, noble issue of fruitfulness, in God's glory, and our own increasing discipleship. Now let me touch upon these briefly.

I.—First, then, our Lord sets forth, with no mere repetition, the same broad idea which He has already been insisting upon—viz., that union with Him is sure to issue in fruitfulness. He repeats the theme, "I am the Vine"; but He points its application by the next clause, "Ye are the branches." That had been implied before, but it needed to be said more definitely. And

are we not all too apt to think of religious truth as swinging *in vacuo* as it were, with no personal application to ourselves? And is not the one thing needful in regard to the truths which are most familiar to us, to bring them into close connection with our own personal life and experience?

"I am the Vine" was a general truth, with no clear personal application. "Ye are the branches" brought each individual listener into connection with it. How many people there are in this chapel this morning, as there are in all our congregations, that listen pleasedly, and, in a fitful sort of languid way, interestedly, to the most glorious and most solemn words that come from preachers' lips, and never dream that what he has been saying has any bearing upon themselves! And the one thing that is most of all needed with people like some of you, who have been listening to the truth all your days, is that it should be sharpened to a point, and the conviction driven into you, that *you* have got something to do with this great message. "Ye are the branches" is the one side of that sharpening and making definite of the truth in its personal application, and the other side is "Thou art the man." All preaching and religious teaching is toothless generality, utterly useless unless we can manage somehow or other to force it through the wall of indifference and vague assent to a general proposition, with which the Gospel-hardened hearers surround themselves, and make them feel that the thing has got a point, and that the point is touching their own consciousness. "Ye are the branches."

Note next the great promise of fruitfulness. "He

that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

I need not repeat what I have said in former sermons as to the plain, practical duties which are included in that abiding in Christ, and Christ's consequent abiding in us. It means, on the part of professedly Christian people, a temper and tone of mind very far remote from the noisy, bustling distractions too common in our present Christianity. We want quiet patient waiting within the veil. We want stillness of heart, brought about by our own distinct effort to put away from ourselves the strife of tongues and the pride of life. We want activity, no doubt, but we want a wise passiveness as its foundation.

Think you, midst all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?

Get away into the "secret place of the Most High," and rise into a higher altitude and atmosphere than the region of work and effort; and, sitting still with Christ, let His love and His power pour themselves into your hearts. "Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee." Get away from the jangling of politics, and empty controversies, and busy distractions of daily duty. The harder our toil necessarily is, the more let us see to it that we keep a little cell within the central life where in silence we hold communion with the Master. "Abide in Me and I in you."

That is the way to be fruitful, rather than by efforts after individual acts of conformity and obedience,

howsoever needful and precious these are. There is a deeper thing wanted than these. The best way to secure Christian conduct is to cultivate communion with Christ. It is better to work at the increase of the central force than at the improvement of the circumferential manifestations of it. Get more of the sap into the branch, and there will be more fruit. Have more of the life of Christ in the soul, and the conduct and the speech will be more Christlike. We may cultivate individual graces at the expense of the harmony and beauty of the whole character. We may grow them artificially and they will be of little worth—by imitation of others, by special efforts after special excellence, rather than by general effort after the central improvement of our nature and therefore of our life. But the true way to influence conduct is to influence the springs of conduct; and to make a man's life better, the true way is to make the man better. First of all be, and then do; first of all receive, and then give forth; first of all draw near to Christ, and then there will be fruit to His praise. That is the Christian way of mending men, not tinkering at this, that, and the other individual excellence, but grasping the secret of total excellence in communion with Him.

Our Lord is here not merely laying down a law, but giving a promise, and putting His veracity into pawn for the fulfilment of it. If a man will keep near Me, He says, "he shall bear fruit."

Notice that little word which now appears for the first time. "He shall bear *much* fruit." We are not to be content with a little fruit; a poor shrivelled bunch of grapes that are more like marbles than

grapes, here and there, upon the half-nourished stem. The abiding in Him will produce a character rich in manifold graces. "A little fruit" is not contemplated by Christ at all. God forbid that I should say that there is no possibility of union with Christ and a little fruit. A little union will have a little fruit; but I would have you notice that the only two alternatives which come into Christ's view here are, on the one hand "no fruit," and on the other hand "much fruit." And I would ask why it is that the average Christian man of this generation bears only a berry or two here and there, like such as are left upon the vines after the vintage, when the promise is that if he will abide in Christ, he will bear much fruit?

This verse, setting forth the fruitfulness of union with Jesus, ends with the brief solemn statement of the converse—the barrenness of separation—"Apart from Me (not merely 'without,' as the Authorized Version has it), ye can do nothing." *There* is the condemnation of all the busy life of men which is not lived in union with Jesus Christ. It is a long row of figures which, like some other long rows of figures added up, amount just to *Zero*. "Without Me, nothing." All your busy life, when you come to sum it up, is made up of plus and minus quantities, which precisely balance each other, and the net result, unless you are in Christ, is just nothing; and on your grave-stones the only right epitaph is a great round cypher. "He did not do anything. There is nothing left of his toil; the whole thing has evaporated and disappeared." That is life apart from Jesus Christ. v

II.—And so note, secondly, the withering and destruction following separation from Him.

Commentators tell us, I think a little prosaically, that when our Lord spoke, it was the time of pruning the vine in Palestine, and that, perhaps, as they went from the upper room to the garden they might see in the valley, here and there, the fires that the labourers had kindled in the vineyards to burn the loppings of the vines. That does not matter. It is of more consequence to notice how the solemn thought of withering and destruction forces itself, so to speak, into these gracious words; and how, even at that moment, our Lord, in all His tenderness and pity, could not but let words of warning--grave, solemn, tragical--drop from His lips.

This generation does not like to hear them, for its conception of the Gospel is a thing with no minor notes in it, with no threatenings, a proclamation of a deliverance, and no proclamation of anything from which deliverance is needed—which is a strange kind of Gospel! But Jesus Christ could not speak about the blessedness of fruitfulness and the joy of life in Himself without speaking about its necessary converse, the awfulness of separation from Him, of barrenness, of withering, and of destruction.

Separation is withering. Did you ever see a hawthorn bough that children bring home from the woods, and stick in the grate; how in a day or two the little fresh green leaves all shrivel up and the white blossoms become brown and smell foul, and the only thing to be done with it is to fling it into the fire and get rid of it? And so, says Jesus Christ, As long as a man holds on to Me and the sap comes into him, he will flourish, and as soon as the connection is broken, all that was so fair will begin to shrivel, and all that was

green will get brown and turn to dust, and all that was blossom will droop, and there will be no more fruit any more for ever. Separate from Christ, the individual shrivels, and the possibilities of fair buds wither and set into no fruit. And no man is the man he might have been unless he holds by Jesus Christ and lets His life come into him.

And as for individuals, so for communities. The Church or the body of professing Christians that is separate from Jesus Christ dies to all noble life, to all high activity, to all Christlike conduct, and, being dead, rots.

Withering means destruction. The language of our text is a description of what befalls the actual branches of the literal vine; but it is made a representation of what befalls the individuals whom these branches represent by that added clause, "like a branch." Look at the mysteriousness of the language. "They gather them." Who? "They cast them into the fire." Who have that tragic task of flinging the withered branches into some mysterious fire? All is left vague with unexplained awfulness. The solemn fact that the withering of manhood by separation from Jesus Christ requires, and ends in, the consuming of the withered, is all that we have here. We have to speak of it pityingly, with reticence, with terror, with tenderness, with awe lest it should be our fate.

But oh! dear brethren, be on your guard against that tendency of the thinking of this generation, to paste a bit of blank paper over all the threatenings of the Bible, and to blot out from our consciousness the grave issues that it holds forth. One of two things must befall the branch, either it is in the Vine

or it gets into the fire. And if we would avoid the fire let us see to it that we are in the Vine.

III.—Thirdly, we have here the union with Christ as the condition of satisfied desires.

“If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Notice how our Lord varies His phraseology here, and instead of saying “I in you,” says “My words in you.” He is speaking about prayers, consequently the variation is natural. In fact, His abiding in us is largely the abiding of His words in us; or, to speak more accurately, the abiding of His words in us is largely the means of His abiding in us.

What is meant by Christ’s words abiding in us? Something a great deal more than the mere intellectual acceptance of them. Something very different from reading a verse of the Gospels in a morning before we go to our work, and forgetting all about it all the day long; something very different from coming in contact with Christian truth on a Sunday, when somebody else preaches what he has found in the Bible to us, and we take in a little of it. It means the whole of the conscious nature of a man being, so to speak, saturated with Christ’s words; His desires, His understanding, His affections, His will, all being steeped in these great truths which the Master spoke. Put a little bit of colouring matter into the fountain at its head, and you will have the stream dyed down its course for ever so far. See that Christ’s words be lodged in your inmost selves, by patient meditation upon them, by continual recurrence to them, and all the life will be glorified and flash into richness of colouring and beauty by their presence.

The main effect of such abiding of the Lord's words with us which our Lord touches upon here is, that in such a case, if my whole inward nature is influenced by the continual operation upon it of the words of the Lord, then my desire will be granted. Do not so vulgarise and lower the nobleness and the loftiness of this great promise as to suppose that it only means. If you remember His words you will get anything you like. It means something a great deal better than that. It means that if Christ's words are the substratum, so to speak, of your wishes, then your wishes will harmonize with His will, and so "ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

Christ loves us a great deal too well to give our own foolish and selfish wills the keys of His treasure-house. The condition of our getting what we will is our willing what He desires ; and unless our prayers are a great deal more the utterance of the submission of our wills to His than they are the attempt to impose ours upon Him, they will not be answered. We get our wishes when our wishes are moulded by His word.

IV.—The last thought that is here is that this union and fruitfulness lead to the noble ends of glorifying God and increasing discipleship.

"Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." Christ's life was all for the glorifying of God. The lives which are ours in name, but being drawn from Him, in their depths are much rather the life of Christ in us than our lives—will have the same end and the same issue.

Ah ! dear brethren, we come there to a very sharp test for us all. I wonder how many of us there are

on whom men looking think more loftily of God and love Him better, and are drawn to Him by strange longings. How many of us are there about whom people will say, "There must be something in the religion that makes a man like that"? How many of us are there to look upon whom suggests to men that God, who can make such a man, must be infinitely sweet and lovely? And yet that is what we should all be—mirrors of the Divine radiance, on which some eyes, that are too dim and sore to bear the light as it streams from the sun, may look, and, beholding the reflection, may learn to love. Does God so shine in me that I lead men to magnify His name? If I am dwelling with Christ it will be so.

I shall not know it. "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone"; but, in meek unconsciousness of the glory that rays from us, we may walk the earth, reflecting the light and making God known to our fellows.

And if thus we abide in Him and bear fruit we shall "be," or (as the word might more accurately be rendered) we shall *become* His "disciples." The end of our discipleship is never reached on earth: we never so much *are* as we are in the process of *becoming*, His true followers and servants.

If we bear fruit because we are knit to Him the fruit itself will help us to get nearer Him, and so be more His disciples and more fruitful. Character produces conduct, but conduct reacts on character, and strengthens the impulses from which it springs. And thus our action as Christian men and women will tell upon our inward lives as Christians, and the more our outward conduct is conformed to the pattern of Jesus

Christ, the more shall we love Him in our inmost hearts. We ourselves shall eat of the fruit which we ourselves have borne to Him.

The alternatives are before us—in Christ, living and fruitful ; out of Christ, barren, and destined to be burned. As the prophet says, “ Will men take of the wood of the vine for any work ? ” Vine-wood is worthless, its only use is to bear fruit ; and if it does not do that, there is only one thing to be done with it, and that is, “ they cast it into the fire, and it is burned.”



XVIII.

Abiding in Love.

“As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you : continue ye in My love.

“If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love ; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”—JOHN xv. 9—11.



THE last of these verses shows that they are to be taken as a kind of conclusion of the great parable of the Vine and the Branches, for it looks back and declares Christ’s purpose in His preceding utterances. The parable proper is ended, but the thoughts of it still linger in our Lord’s mind, and echo through His words, as the vibration of some great bell after the stroke has ceased. The main thoughts of the parable were these two, that participation in Christ’s life was the source of all good, and that abiding in Him was the means of participation in His life. And these same thoughts, though modified in their form, and free from the parabolical element, appear in the words that we have to consider this morning. The parable spoke about abiding in Christ ;

our text defines that abiding, and makes it still more tender and gracious by substituting for it, "abiding in His love."] The parable spoke of conduct as fruit, the effortless result of communion with Jesus. Our text speaks of it with more emphasis laid on the human side, as "keeping the commandments." The parable told us that abiding in Christ was the condition of bearing fruit. Our text tells us the converse, which is also true, that bearing fruit, or keeping the commandments, is the condition of abiding in Christ. So our Lord takes His thought, as it were, and turns it round before us, letting us see both sides of it, and then tells us that He does all this for one purpose, which in itself is a token of His love, namely, that our hearts may be filled with perfect and perennial joy, a drop from the fountain of His own.

These three verses have three words which may be taken as their key-notes—love, obedience, joy. We shall look at them in that order.

I.—First, then, we have here the love in which it is our sweet duty to abide. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love."

What shall we say about these mysterious and profound first words of this verse? They carry us into the very depths of Divinity, and suggest for us that wonderful analogy between the relation of the Father to the Son, and that of the Son to His disciples, which appears over and over again in the solemnities of these last hours and words of Jesus. Christ here claims to be, in a unique and solitary fashion, the object of the Father's love, and He claims to be able to love like God. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." As deeply, as purely, as fully, as eternally, and

with all the unnameable perfectnesses which must belong to the Divine affection, does Christ declare that He loves us.

I know not whether the majesty and uniqueness of His nature stand out more clearly in the one or in the other of these two assertions. As beloved of God, and as loving like God, He equally claims for Himself a place which none other can fill, and declares that the love which falls on us from His pierced and bleeding heart is really the love of God.

In this mysterious, awful, tender, perfect affection He exhorts us to abide. That comes yet closer to our hearts than the other phrase of which it is the modification, and in some sense the explanation. The command to abide in Him suggests much that is blessed, but to have all that mysterious abiding in Him resolved into abiding in His love is infinitely tenderer, and draws us still closer to Himself. Obviously, what is meant is not our continuance in the attitude of love to Him, but rather our continuance in the sweet and sacred atmosphere of His love to us. For the connection between the two halves of the verse necessarily requires that the love in which we are to abide should be identical with the love which had been previously spoken of, and *that* is clearly His love to us, and not ours to Him. But then, on the other hand, whosoever thus abides in Christ's love to him will echo it back again, in an equally continuous love to Him. So that the two things flow together, and to abide in the conscious possession of Christ's love to me is the certain and inseparable cause of its effect, my abiding in the continual exercise and outgoing of my love to Him.

Now, note that this continuance in Christ's love is a thing in our power, since it is commanded. Although it is His affection of which my text primarily speaks, I can so modify and regulate the flow of that Divine love to my heart that it becomes my duty to continue in Christ's love to me.

What a quiet, blessed home that is for us! The image, I suppose, that underlies all this sweet speech in these last hours, about dwelling in Christ, in His joy, in His words, in His peace, and the like, is that of some safe house, into which, going, we may be secure. And what sorrow or care or trouble or temptation would be able to reach us if we were folded in the protection of that strong love, and always felt that it was the fortress into which we might continually resort? They who make their abode there, and dwell behind those firm bastions, need fear no foes, but are lifted high above them all. "Abide in My love," for they who dwell within the clefts of that Rock need none other defence; and they to whom the riven heart of Christ is the place of their abode are safe, whatsoever befalls. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love."

II.—Now, note, secondly, the obedience by which we continue in Christ's love.

The analogy, on which He has already touched, is still continued. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Note that Christ here claims for Himself absolute and unbroken conformity with the Father's will, and consequent uninterrupted and complete communion

with the Father's love. It is the utterance of a nature conscious of no sin, of a humanity that never knew one instant's film of separation, howsoever thin, howsoever brief, between Him and the Father. No more tremendous words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus Christ declares that never, all His life long, had there been the smallest deflection or want of conformity between the Father's will and *His* desires and doings, and that never had there been one grain of dust, as it were, between the two polished plates which adhered so closely in inseparable union of harmony and love.

And then notice, still further, how Christ here, with His consciousness of perfect obedience and communion, intercepts *our* obedience and diverts it to Himself. He does not say, "Obey God as I have done and He will love you"; but He says, "Obey *Me* as I obey God and *I* will love you." Who is this that thus comes between the child's heart and the Father's? Does He come *between* when He stands thus? or does He rather lead us up to the Father, and to a share in His own filial obedience?

He further assures us that, by keeping His commandments, we shall continue in that sweet home and safe stronghold of His love. Of course, the keeping of the commandment is something more than mere outward conformity by action. It is the inward harmony of will, and the bowing of the whole nature. It is, in fact, the same thing (though considered under a different aspect, and from a somewhat different point of view) as He has already been speaking about as the fruit of the vine, by the bearing of which the Father is glorified. And this

obedience, the obedience of the hands because the heart obeys, and does so because it loves, the bowing of the will in glad submission to the loved and holy will of the heavens—this obedience is the condition of our continuing in Christ's love.

He will love us better the more we obey His commandments, for although His tender heart is charged with the love of pity and of desire to help, towards all, even the disobedient, He cannot but feel a growing thrill of satisfied and gratified affection towards us, in the measure in which we become like Himself. The love that wept over us, when we were enemies, will "rejoice over us with singing," when we are friends. The love, that sought the sheep when it was wandering, will pour itself yet more tenderly and with selecter gifts upon it when it follows in the footsteps of the flock, and keeps close at the heels of the Good Shepherd. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love," and will put nothing between you and Me which will make it impossible for the tender tenderness of that holy love to come to your hearts.

The obedience which we render for love's sake will make us more capable of receiving, and more blessedly conscious of possessing, the love of Jesus Christ. The lightest cloud before the sun will prevent it from focussing its rays to a burning point on the convex glass. And the small, thin, fleeting, scarcely visible acts of self-will that sometimes pass across our skies will prevent our feeling the warmth of that love upon our shrouded hearts. Every known piece of rebellion against Christ will shatter all true enjoyment of His favour, unless we are hopeless hypocrites or self-

deceived. ¶ The condition of knowing and feeling the warmth and blessedness of Christ's love to me is the honest submission of my nature to His commandments. You cannot rejoice in Jesus Christ unless you do His will. ¶ You will have no real comfort and blessedness in your religion unless it works itself out in your daily lives. That is why so many of you know nothing, or next to nothing, about the joy of Christ's felt presence, because you do not, for all your professions, hourly and momentarily regulate and submit your wills to His commandments. Do what He wants, and do it because He wants it, if you wish that His love should fill your hearts. ¶

And, further, we shall continue in His love by obedience, inasmuch as every emotion which finds expression in our daily life is strengthened by the fact that it is expressed. The love which works is love which grows, and the tree that bears fruit is the tree that is healthy and increases. So, note how all these deepest things of Christian teaching come at last to a plain piece of practical duty. We talk about the mysticism of John's Gospel, about the depth of these last sayings of Jesus Christ. Yes! They are mystical, they are deep—unfathomably deep, thank God!—but connected by the shortest possible road with the plainest possible duties. "Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous." It is no use talking about communion with Jesus Christ, and abiding in Him, in possession of His love, and all those other properly mystical sides of Christian experience, unless you verify them for yourselves by the plain way of practice. Doing as Christ bids us, and doing that habitually and doing it gladly, then, and only

then, are we in no danger of losing ourselves in the depths, or of forgetting that Christ's mission has for its last result the influencing of character and of conduct. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

III.—Lastly, note the joy which follows on this practical obedience. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain," or might *be* in you, "and that your joy might be full."

"My joy might be in you." A strange time to talk of His "joy." In half-an-hour He would be in Gethsemane, and we know what happened there. Was Christ a joyful man? He was a man of sorrows. But one of the old psalms says, "Thou hast loved righteousness, . . . therefore God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." The deep truth that lies there is the same that He here claims as being fulfilled in His own experience, that absolute surrender and submission in love to the beloved commands of a loving Father made Him, in spite of sorrows, in spite of the baptism with which He was baptized, in spite of all the burden and the weight of our sins—the most joyful of men.

This joy He offers to us, a joy coming from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love, to a love that to us seems absolutely good and sweet. There is no joy that humanity is capable of to compare for a moment with that bright, warm, continuous sunshine which floods the soul, that is freed from all the clouds and mists of self and the darkness of sin. Self-sacrifice at the bidding of Jesus Christ is the recipe for the highest, the most exquisite,

the most godlike gladnesses of which the human heart is capable. Our joy will remain if His joy is ours. Then our joy will be, up to the measure of its capacity, ennobled, and filled, and progressive, advancing ever towards fuller possession of His joy, and deeper calm of that pure and perennial rapture, which makes the settled and celestial bliss of those who have entered into the joy of their Lord.

Brother! there is only one gladness that is worth calling so – and that is, that which comes to us, when we give ourselves utterly away to Jesus Christ, and let Him do with us as He will. It is better to have a joy that is central and perennial—though there may be, as there will be, a surface of sorrow and care—than to have the converse, a surface of joy and a black unsympathetic kernel of aching unrest and sadness. In one or other of these two states we all live. Either we have to say, “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing,” or we have to feel, “even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.” Let us choose for ourselves, and let us choose aright, the gladness which coils round the heart, and endures for ever, and is found in submission to Jesus Christ, rather than the superficial, fleeting joys which are rooted on earth and perish with time.



XIX.

The Oneness of the Branches.

“This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”—JOHN xv. 12, 13.



THE union between Christ and His disciples has been tenderly set forth in the parable of the Vine and the branches. We now turn to the union between the disciples, which is the consequence of their common union to the Lord. The branches are parts of one whole, and necessarily bear a relation to each other. We may modify for our present purpose the analogous statement of the Apostle in reference to the Lord's Supper, and as He says, “We, being many, are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread,” so we may say—The branches, being many, are one Vine, for they are all partakers of that one Vine. Of this union amongst the branches, which results from their common inherence in the Vine, the natural expression and manifestation is the mutual love, which Christ here gives as *the* commandment, and commends to us all by His own solemn example.

There are four things suggested to me by the words

of our text—the Obligation, the Sufficiency, the Pattern, and the Motive of Christian love.

I.—First, the Obligation.

The two ideas of commandment and love do not go well together. You cannot pump up love to order, and if you try you generally produce what we see in abundance in the world and in the Church, sentimental hypocrisy, hollow and unreal. But whilst that is true, and whilst it seems strange to say that we are commanded to love, still we can do a great deal, directly and indirectly, for the cultivation and strengthening of any emotion. We can either cast ourselves into the attitude which is favourable or unfavourable to it. We can either look at the subjects which will create it or at those which will check it. We can go about with a sharp eye for the lovable or for the unlovable in man. We can either consciously war against or lazily acquiesce in our own predominant self-absorption and selfishness. And in these and in a number of other ways, our feelings towards other Christian people are very largely under our own control, and therefore are fitting subjects for commandment.

Our Lord lays down the obligation which devolves upon all Christian people, of cherishing a kindly and loving regard to all others who find their place within the charmed circle of His Church. It is an obligation because He commands it. He puts Himself here in the position of the absolute Lawgiver, who has the right of entire and authoritative control over men's affections and hearts. And it is further obligatory because such an attitude is the only fitting expression of the mutual relation of Christian men, through their common relation to the Vine. If there be the

one life-sap circling through all parts of the mighty whole, how anomalous and how contradictory it is that these parts should not be harmoniously concordant among themselves ! However unlike any two Christian people are to each other in character, in culture, in circumstances, the bond that knits those who have the same relations to Jesus Christ one to another is far deeper, far more real, and ought to be far closer, than the bond that knits either of them to the men or women to whom they are likeliest in all these other respects, and to whom they are unlike in this central one. Christian men ! you are closer to every other Christian man, down in the depths of your being, however he may be differenced from you by things that are very hard to get over, than you are to the people that you like best and love most, if they do not participate with you in this common love to Jesus Christ.

I dread talking mere sentiment about this matter, for there is perhaps no part of Christian duty which has been so vulgarized and pawed over by mere unctuous talk, as that of the fellowship that should subsist between all Christians. But I have one plain question to put—Does anybody believe that the present condition of Christendom, and the relations to one another even of good Christian people in the various churches and communions of our own and of other lands, is the sort of thing that Jesus Christ meant, or is anything like a fair and adequate representation of the deep, essential unity that knits us all together ?

We need far more the realizing of the fact that our emotions towards our brother Christians are not matters in which our own inclinations may have their

way, but that there is a simple commandment given to us, and that we are bound to cherish love to every man that loves Jesus Christ. Never mind though he does not hold your theology; never mind though he be very ignorant and narrow as compared with you; never mind though your outlook of the world may be entirely unlike his. Never mind though you be a rich man and he a poor one, or you a poor one and he rich, which is just as hard to get over. Let all these secondary grounds of union and of separation be relegated to their proper subordinate place; and let us recognize this, that the children of one Father are brethren. And do not let it be possible that it shall be said, as so often has been said, and said truly, that "brethren" in the Church means a great deal less than *brothers* in the world. Lift your eyes beyond the walls of the little sheepfold in which you live, and hearken to the bleating of the flocks away out yonder, and feel—"Other sheep He has which are not of this fold"; and recognize the solemn obligation of the commandment of love.

II.—Note, secondly, the Sufficiency of love.

Our Lord has been speaking in a former verse about the keeping of His commandments. Now He gathers them all up into one. "This is My commandment, That ye love one another." All duties to our fellows, and all duties to our brethren, are summed up in, or resolved into, this one germinal, encyclopædical, all-comprehensive simplification of duty, into the one word "love."

Where the heart is right the conduct will be right. Love will soften the tones, will instinctively teach what we ought to be and do; will take the bitterness

off opposition and diversity, will make even rebuke, when needful, only a form of expressing itself. If the heart be right all else will be right; and if there be a deficiency of love nothing will be right. You cannot help anybody except on condition of having an honest, beneficent, and benevolent regard towards him. You cannot do any man in the world any good unless there is a shoot of love in your heart towards him. You may pitch him benefits, and you will neither get nor deserve thanks for them; you may try to teach him, and your words will be hopeless and profitless. The one thing that is required to bind Christian men together is this common affection. That being there, everything will come. It is the germ out of which all is developed. As we read in that great chapter to the Corinthians—the lyric praise of Charity—all kinds of blessing and sweetness and gladness come out of this. It is the central force which, being present, secures that all shall be right, which, being absent, secures that all shall be wrong.

And is it not beautiful to see how Jesus Christ, leaving the little flock of His followers in the world, gave them no other instruction for their mutual relationship? He did not talk to them about institutions and organizations, about orders of the ministry and sacraments, or Church polity and the like. He knew that all that would come. His one commandment was, "Love one another," and that will make you wise. Love one another, and you will shape yourselves into the right forms. He knew that they needed no exhortations such as ecclesiastics would have put in the foreground. It was not worth while to talk to them about organizations and officers. That would come to

them at the right time and in the right way. The one thing needful was that they should be knit together as true participators of His life. Love was sufficient as their law and as their guide.

III.—Note, further, the Pattern of love.

“As I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Christ sets Himself forward, then, here, and in this aspect, as He does in all aspects of human conduct and character, as being the realized ideal of them all. And although the thought is a digression from my present purpose, I cannot but pause for a moment to reflect upon the strangeness of a man thus calmly saying to the whole world, “I am the embodiment of all that love ought to be. You cannot get beyond Me, nor have anything more pure, more deep, more self-sacrificing, more perfect, than the love which I have borne to you.”

But, passing that, the pattern that He proposes for us is even more august than appears at first sight. For, if you remember, a verse or two before our Lord had said, “As the Father hath loved Me so I have loved you.” Now He says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” There stand the three, as it were, the Father, the Son, the disciple. The Son in the midst receives and transmits the Father’s love to the disciple, and the disciple is to love his fellows, in some deep and august sense, as the Father loved the Son. The divinest thing in God, and that in which men can be like God, is love. In all our other attitudes to Him we rather correspond than copy. His fulness is met by our emptiness, His giving by our recipiency, His faithfulness by our faith, His command by our

obedience, His light by our eye. But here it is not a case of correspondence only, but of similarity. My faith *answers* God's gift to me, but my love is *like* God's love. "Be ye, therefore, imitators of God as beloved children"; and having received that love on to your hearts ray it out, "and walk in love as God also hath loved us."

But then our Lord here, in a very wonderful manner, sets forth the very central point of His work, even His death upon the Cross for us, as being the pattern to which our poor affection ought to aspire, and after which it must tend to be conformed. I need not remind you, I suppose, that our Lord here is not speaking of the propitiatory character of His death, nor of the issues which depend upon it, and upon it alone—viz., the redemption and salvation of the world. He is not speaking, either, of the peculiar and unique sense in which He lays down His life *for* us, His friends and brethren, as none other can do. He is speaking about it simply in its aspect of being a voluntary surrender, at the bidding of love, for the good of those whom He loved, and that, He tells us—that, and nothing else, is the true pattern and model, towards which all our love is bound to tend and to aspire. That is to say, the heart of the love that He commands is self-sacrifice, reaching to death if death be needful. And no man loves as Christ would have him love who does not bear in his heart affection which has so conquered selfishness that, if need be, he is ready to die.

The expression of Christian life is not to be found in honeyed words, or the indolent indulgence in benevolent emotion, but in self-sacrifice, modelled after

that of Christ's sacrificial death, which is imitable by us.

Brethren, it is a solemn obligation, which may well make us tremble, that is laid on us in these words, "As I have loved you." Calvary was less than twenty-four hours off, and He says to us, "*That* is your pattern!" Contrast our love at its height with His—a drop to an ocean, a poor little flickering rushlight held up beside the sun. My love, at its best, has so far conquered my selfishness that now and then I am ready to suffer a little inconvenience, to sacrifice a little leisure, to give away a little money, to spend a little dribble of sympathy upon the people who are its objects. Christ's love nailed Him to the cross, and led Him down from the throne, and shut for a time the gates of the glory behind Him. And He says, "That is your pattern!"

Oh! let us bow down and confess how His Word, which commands us, puts us to shame, when we think of how miserably we have obeyed.

Remember, too, that the restriction which here seems to be cast around the flow of His love is not a restriction in reality, but rather a deepening of it. He says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But evidently He calls them so from His point of view and as He sees them, not from their point of view, as they see Him—that is to say, He means by "friends" not those who love Him, but those whom He loves. The "friends" for whom He dies are the same persons as the Apostle, in his sweet variation upon the words of my text, has called by the opposite name, when he says that He died for His "enemies."

There is an old wild ballad that tells of how a knight found, coiling round a tree in a dismal forest, a loathly dragon breathing out poison ; and how, undeterred by its hideousness and foulness, he cast his arms round it and kissed it on the mouth. Three times he did it undisgusted, and at the third the shape changed into a fair lady, and he won his bride. Christ "kisses with the kisses of His mouth" His enemies, and makes them His friends because He loves them. "If He had never died for His enemies," says one of the old fathers, "He would never have possessed His friends." And so He teaches us, in what seems to be this restriction of the purpose of His death and the sweep of His love, that the way by which we are to meet even alienation and hostility is by pouring upon it the treasures of an unselfish, self-sacrificing affection which will conquer at the last.

Christ's death is the pattern for our lives as well as the hope of our hearts.

IV.—Lastly, we have here by implication, though not by direct statement, the motive of the love.

Surely that, too, is contained in the words, "As I have loved you." Christ's commandment of love is a new commandment, not so much because it is a revelation of a new duty, though it is the casting of an old duty into new prominence, as, because it not merely a revelation of an obligation, but the communication of a power to fulfil it. The novelty of Christian morality lies here, that in its law there is a self-fulfilling force. We have not to look to one place for the knowledge of our duty, and somewhere else for the strength to do it, but both are given to us in the one

thing, the gift of the dying Christ and His immortal love.

That love, received into our hearts, will conquer, and it alone will conquer, our selfishness. That love, received into our hearts, will mould, and it alone will mould, them into its own likeness. That love, received into our hearts, will knit, and it alone will knit, all those who participate in it into a common bond, sweet, deep, sacred, and all victorious.

And so, brethren, if we want to know the blessedness and the sweetness of victory over these miserable selfish hearts of ours, and to walk in the liberty of love, we can only get it by keeping close to Jesus Christ. In any circle, the nearer the points of the circumference are to the centre, the closer they will necessarily be to one another. As we draw nearer, each for ourselves, to the Master, we shall feel that we have approximated to all those who stand round the same centre, and draw from it the same life. In the early spring, when the wheat is green and young, and scarcely appears above the ground, it comes up in the lines in which it was sown, parted from one another and distinctly showing their separation and the furrows. But, when the full corn in the ear waves on the autumn plain, all the lines and separations have disappeared, and there is one unbroken tract of sunny fruitfulness. And so when the life in Christ is low and feeble, His servants may be separated and drawn up in rigid lines of denominations, and churches, and sects; but as they grow the lines disappear. If to the churches of England to-day there came a sudden accession of knowledge of Christ, and of union with Him, the first thing that would go

would be the wretched barriers that separate us from one another. For if we have the life of Christ in any adequate measure in ourselves, we shall certainly have grown up above the fences behind which we began to grow, and shall be able to reach out to all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel with thankfulness that we are one in Him.



Christ's Friends.

“Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain : that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you. These things I command you that ye love one another.”—JOHN XV. 14—17.



WONDERFUL word has just dropped from the Master's lips, when He spoke of laying down His life for His *friends*. He lingers on it as if the idea conveyed was too great and sweet at once to be taken in, and with soothing reiteration He assures the little group that they, even they, are His friends.

I have ventured to take so many verses for consideration now, although each of them, and each clause of them, might afford ample material for a discourse, because they have one common theme. They are a description of what Christ's friends are to Him, of what He is to them, and of what they should be to one another. So they are a little picture, in the

sweetest form, of the reality, the blessedness, the obligations of Christ's friendship.

I.—Notice what Christ's friends do for Him.

"Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." In the former verse, "friends" means chiefly those whom He loved. Here it means mainly those who love Him. They love Him because He loves them, of course; and the two sides of the one thought cannot be parted. But still in this verse the idea of friendship to Christ is looked at from the human side; and He tells His disciples that they are His lovers as well as beloved of Him, on condition of their doing whatsoever He commands them.

He lingers, as I said, on the idea itself. As if He would meet the doubts arising from the sense of unworthiness, and from some dim perception of how He towers above them, and their limitations, He reiterates, "Wonderful as it is, you poor men, half-intelligent lovers of Mine, *you* are My friends, beloved of Me, and loving Me, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

How wonderful that stooping love of His is, which condescends to array itself in the garments of ours! Every form of human love Christ lays His hand upon, and claims that He Himself exercises it in a transcendent degree. "He that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother." That which is even sacred, the purest and most complete union that humanity is capable of—that, too, He consecrates; for even it, sacred as it is, is capable of a higher consecration, and, sweet as it is, receives a new sweetness when we think of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and remember the parables in which

He speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Great King, and sets forth Himself as the Husband of humanity. And, passing from that Holy of Holies out into this outer court, He lays His hand, too, on that more common and familiar, and yet precious and sacred, thing—the bond of friendship. The Prince makes a friend of the beggar.

Even if we do not think more loftily of Jesus Christ than do those who regard Him simply as the perfection of humanity, is it not beautiful and wonderful that He should look with such eyes of beaming love on that handful of poor, ignorant fishermen, who knew Him so dimly, and say: “I pass by all the wise and the mighty, all the lofty and noble, and My heart clings to you poor, insignificant people”? He stoops to make them His friends, and there are none so low but that they may be His.

This friendship lasts to-day. A peculiarity of Christianity is the strong personal tie of real love and intimacy, which will bind men, to the end of time, to this Man that died nineteen hundred years ago. We look back into the wastes of antiquity: mighty names rise there that we reverence; there are great teachers from whom we have learned, and to whom, after a fashion, we are grateful. But what a gulf there is between us and the best and noblest of them! But here is a dead Man, who to-day is the object of passionate attachment and a love deeper than life to millions of people, and will be till the end of time. There is nothing in the whole history of the world the least like that strange bond which ties you and me to Jesus Christ, and the paradox of the Apostle remains a unique fact in the experience of humanity: “Jesus

Christ, whom, having not seen, ye love." We stretch out our hands across the waste, silent centuries, and there, amidst the mists of oblivion, thickening round all other figures in the past, we touch the warm, throbbing heart of our Friend, who lives for ever, and for ever is near us. We here, nearly two milleniums after the words fell on the nightly air on the road to Gethsemane, have them coming direct to our hearts. A perpetual bond unites men with Christ to-day ; and for us, as really as in that long-past Paschal night, is it true, "Ye are My friends."

There are no limitations in that friendship, no misconstructions in that heart, no alienation possible, no change to be feared. There is absolute rest for us there. Why should I be solitary if Jesus Christ is my Friend ? Why should I fear if He walks by my side ? Why should anything be burdensome if He lays it upon me, and helps me to bear it ? What is there in life that cannot be faced and borne—aye, and conquered—if we have Him, as we all may have Him, for the Friend and the Home of our hearts ?

But notice the condition, "If ye do what I command you." Note the singular blending of friendship and command, involving on our parts the cultivation of the two things which are not incompatible, absolute submission and closest friendship. He commands though He is Friend ; though He commands He is Friend. The conditions that He lays down are the same which have already occupied our attention in former sermons of this series, and so may be touched very lightly. "Ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you," may either correspond with His former saying, "If a man love Me he

will keep My commandments," or with His later one, which immediately precedes it, "If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love." For this is the relationship between love and obedience, in regard to Jesus Christ, that the love is the parent of the obedience, and the obedience is the guard and guarantee of the love. They that love will obey, they who obey will strengthen the love by acting according to its dictates, and will be in a condition to feel and realize more the warmth of the rays that stream down upon them, and to send back more answering obedience from their hearts. Not in mere emotion, not in mere verbal expression, not in mere selfish realizing of the blessings of His friendship, and not in mere mechanical, external acts of conformity, but in the flowing down and melting of the hard and obstinate iron will, at the warmth of His great love, is our love made perfect. Obedience, which is the child and the preserver of love, is something far deeper than the mere outward conformity with the externally apprehended commandments. To submit is the expression of love, and love is deepened by submission.

II.—Secondly, note what Christ does for His friends.

"Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth." The slave may see what his lord does, but he does not know his purpose in his acts. "Theirs not to reason why." In so far as the relation of master and servant goes, and still more in that of owner and slave, there is simply command on the one side and unintelligent obedience on the other. The command needs no explanation, and if the servant is in his master's confidence he is more than a servant. But, says Christ, "I have called you

friends"; and He called them so before He now named them so. He called them so in act, and He points to all His past relationship, and especially to the heart-outpourings of the upper room, as the proof that He has called them His friends, by the fact that whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had made known to them.

Jesus Christ, then, recognizes the obligation of absolute frankness, and He will tell His friends everything that He can. When He tells them what He can, the voice of the Father speaks through the Son. Every one of Christ's friends stands nearer to God than did Moses at the door of the Tabernacle, when the wondering camp beheld him face to face with the blaze of the Shekinah glory, and dimly heard the thunderous utterances of the Godhead as He spake to him as a man speaks to his friend. That was surface-speech compared with the Divine depth and fulness of the communications which Jesus Christ deems Himself bound, and assumes Himself able, to make to them who love Him and whom He loves.

Of course, to Christ's frankness there are limits. He will not pour out His treasures into vessels that will spill them; and, as He Himself says in the subsequent part of this great discourse, "I have many things to say unto you, but you are not able to carry them now." His last word was, "I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and *will declare it.*" And though here He speaks as if His communication was perfect, we are to remember that it was necessarily conditioned by the power of reception on the part of the hearers, and that there was much yet to be revealed of what God had whispered to Him, ere these men,

that clustered round Him, could understand the message.

That frank speech is continued to-day. Jesus Christ recognizes the obligation that binds Him to impart to each of us all that each of us is capable of receiving in our inmost spirits. By the light which He sheds on the Word, by many a suggestion through human lips, by many a blessed thought rising quietly within our hearts, and bearing the token that it comes from a sacred source than our poor, blundering minds, He still speaks to us, His friends.

Ought not that thought of the utter frankness of Jesus make us, for one thing, very patient, intellectually and spiritually, of the gaps that are left in His communications and in our knowledge? There are so many things that we sometimes think we should like to know, things about that dark future where some of our hearts live so constantly, things about the depths of His nature and the Divine character, things about the relation between God's love and God's righteousness, things about the meaning of all this dreadful mystery in which we grope our way. These and a hundred others suggest to us that it would have been so easy for Him to have lifted a little corner of the veil, and let a little more of the light shine out. He holds all in His hand. Why does He thus open one finger instead of the whole palm? Because He loves. A friend exercises the right of reticence as well as the prerogative of speech. And for all the gaps that are left, let us bow quietly and believe that if it had been better for us He would have spoken. "If it were not so I would have told you." "Trust Me! I tell you all that it is good for you to receive."

And that frankness may well teach us another lesson—viz., the obligation of keeping our ears open and our hearts prepared to receive the speech that comes from Him. Ah! brother! many a message from your Lord flits past you, like the idle wind through an archway, because you are not listening for His voice. If we kept down the noise of that “household jar within”; if we silenced passion, ambition, selfishness, worldliness; if we withdrew ourselves, as we ought to do, from the Babel of this world, and hid ourselves in His pavilion from the strife of tongues; if we took less of our religion out of books and from other people, and were more accustomed to “dwell in the secret place of the Most High,” and to say, “Speak, Friend, for Thy Friend heareth,” we should more often understand how real to-day is the voice of Christ to them that love Him.

Such rebounds the inward ear
Catches often from afar;
Listen! prize them, hold them dear,
For of God—of God!—they are.

III.—Thirdly, notice how Christ's friends come to be so, and why they are so.

“Ye have not chosen,” &c. (verse 16).

Our Lord refers here, no doubt, primarily to the little group of the Apostles; the choice and ordaining as well as “the fruit that abides,” pointing, in the first place, to their apostolic office, and to the results of their apostolic labours. But we must widen out the words a great deal more than that.

In all the cases of friendship between Christ and men, the origination and initiation come from Him. “We love Him because He first loved us.” He has

told us how, in His Divine alchemy, He changes by the dropping of His blood our enmity into friendship. In the previous verse He has said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And, as I remarked in my last sermon, the friends here are the same as "the enemies" for whom the Apostles tell us that Christ laid down His life. Since He has thus by the blood of the Cross changed men's enmity into friendship, it is true universally that the amity between us and Christ comes entirely from Him.

But there is more than that in the words. I do not suppose that any man, whatever his theological notions and standpoint may be, who has felt the love of Christ in his own heart in however feeble a measure, but will say, as the Apostle said, "I was apprehended of Christ." It is because He lays His seeking and drawing hand upon us that we ever come to love Him. And it is true that His choice of us precedes our choice of Him, and that the Shepherd always comes to seek the sheep that is lost in the wilderness.

This, then, is how we come to be His friends; because, when we were enemies, He loved us, and gave Himself for us, and ever since has been sending out the ambassadors and the messengers of His love—or, rather, the rays and beams of it, which are parts of Himself—to draw us to His heart. And the purpose which all this forthgoing of Christ's initial and originating friendship has had in view is set forth in words which I can only touch in the lightest possible manner. The intention is twofold. First, it respects service or fruit. "That ye may *go*." There

is deep pathos and meaning in that word. He had been telling them that He was going ; now He says to them, " You are to go ! We part here. My road lies upward ; yours runs onward. Go into all the world." He gives them a *quasi*-independent position ; He declares the necessity of separation ; He declares also the reality of union in the midst of the separation ; He sends *them* out on their course with His benediction, as He does *us*. Wheresoever we go in obedience to His will, we carry the consciousness of His friendship.

" That ye may bring forth fruit." He goes back for a moment to the sweet emblem with which this chapter begins, and recurs to the imagery of the Vine and the fruit. " Keeping His commandments " does not explain the whole process by which we do the things that are pleasing in His sight. We must also take this other metaphor of the bearing of *fruit*. Neither an effortless, instinctive bringing forth from the renewed nature and the Christlike disposition, nor a painful and strenuous effort at obedience to His law, describes the whole realities of Christian service. There must be the effort ; for men do not grow Christlike in character as the vine grows its grapes, but there must also be, regulated and disciplined by the effort, the inward life, for no mere outward obedience and tinkering at duties and commandments will produce the fruit that Christ desires and rejoices to have. First, unity of life with Him ; and then effort. Take care of modern teachings that do not recognize these two as both essential to the complete ideal of Christian service—the spontaneous fruit-bearing, and the strenuous effort after obedience.

“That your fruit should remain.” Nothing corrupts faster than fruit. There is only one kind of fruit that is permanent, incorruptible. The only life’s activity that outlasts life and the world is the activity of the men that obey Christ.

The other half of the issues of this friendship is the satisfying of our desires, “that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He may give it you.” We have already had substantially the same promise in previous parts of this discourse, and therefore I may deal with it very lightly. How comes it that it is certain that Christ’s friends, living close to Him, and bearing fruit, will get what they want? Because what they want will be in His name—that is to say, in accordance with His disposition and will. Make your desires Christ’s, and Christ’s yours, and you will be satisfied.

IV.—And now, lastly, for one moment, note the mutual friendship of Christ’s friends.

We have frequently had to consider that point—the relation of the friends of Christ to one another. “These things I command you, that ye love one another.” This whole context is, as it were, enclosed within a golden circlet by that commandment which appeared in a former verse, at the beginning of it, “This is My commandment, that ye love one another,” and re-appears here at the close, thus shutting off this portion from the rest of the discourse. Friends of a friend should themselves be friends. We care for the lifeless things that a dear friend has cared for; books, articles of use of various sorts. If these have been of interest to him, they are treasures and precious evermore to us. And here are living men and women, in all diver-

sities of character and circumstances, but with this stamped upon them all—Christ's friends, lovers of and loved by Him. And how can we be indifferent to those to whom Christ is not indifferent? We are knit together by that bond. Oh, brother, we are but poor friends of that Master, unless we feel that all which is dear to Him is dear to us. Let us feel the electric thrill which ought to pass through the whole linked circle, and let us beware that we slip not our hands from the grasp of the neighbour on either side, lest, parted from them, we should be isolated from Him and lose some of the love which we fail to transmit.



Sheep among Wolves.

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own : but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you : if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.”—
JOHN XV. 18—20.



THESE words strike a discord in the midst of the sweet music to which we have been listening. The keynote of all that has preceded has been love—the love of Christ’s friends to one another, and of all to Him, as an answer to His love to all. That love, which is one, whether it rise to Him or is diffused on the level of earth, is the result of that unity of life between the Vine and the branches, of which our Lord has been speaking such great and wonderful things. But that unity of life between Christians and Christ has another consequence than the spread of love. Just because it binds them to Him in a sacred community, it separates them from those who do not share in His life, and

hence the "hate" of our context is the shadow of "love"; and there result two communities—to use the much-abused words that designate them—the Church and the World; and the antagonism between these is deep, fundamental, and perpetual.

Unquestionably, our Lord is here speaking with special reference to the Apostles, who, in a very tragic sense, were "sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." If we may trust tradition, every one of that little company, Speaker as well as hearers, died a martyr's death, with the exception of John himself, who was preserved from it by miracle. But, be that as it may, our Lord is here laying down a universal statement of the permanent condition of things; and there is no more reason for restricting the force of these words to the original hearers of them than there is for restricting the force of any of the rest of this wonderful discourse. The world will be in antagonism to the Church until the world ceases to be a world, because it obeys the King; and then, and not till then, will it cease to be hostile to His subjects.

I.—What makes this hostility inevitable?

Our Lord here prepares His hearers for what is coming by putting it in the gentle form of an hypothesis. The frequency with which "if" occurs in this section is very remarkable. He will not startle them by the bare, naked statement which they, in that hour of depression and agitation, were so little able to endure, but He puts it in the shape of a "suppose that," not because there is any doubt, but in order to alleviate the pain of the impression which He needs to make. He says, "If the world hates," not "if

the world hate"; and the tense of the original shows that, whilst the form of the statement is hypothetical, the substance of it is prophetic.

Jesus points to two things, as you will observe, which makes this hostility inevitable. "If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before you." And again, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The very language carries with it the implication of necessary and continual antagonism. For what is "the world," in this context, but the aggregate of men, who have no share in the love and life that flow from Jesus Christ? Necessarily, they constitute a unity, whatever diversities there may be amongst them, and, necessarily, that unity in its banded phalanx is in antagonism, in some measure, to those who constitute the other unity, which holds by Christ, and has been drawn by Him from out of the world.

If we share Christ's life, we must, necessarily, in some measure, share His fate. It is the typical example of what the world thinks of, and does to, goodness. And all who have "the spirit of life which was in Jesus Christ" for the animating principle of their lives, will, just in the measure in which they possess it, come under the same influences which carried Him to the Cross. In a world like this, it is impossible for a man to "love righteousness and hate iniquity," and to order his life accordingly, without treading on somebody's corns; being a rebuke to the opposite course of conduct, either interfering with men's self-complacency, or with their interests. From

the beginning the blind world has repaid goodness by antagonism and contempt.

And then our Lord touches another, and yet closely-connected, cause when He speaks of His selecting the apostles, and drawing them out of the world, as a reason for the world's hostility. There are two groups, and the fundamental principles that underlie each are in deadly antagonism. In the measure in which you and I are Christians we are in direct opposition to all the maxims which rule the world and make it a world. What we believe to be precious it regards as of no account. What we believe to be fundamental truth it passes by as of little importance. Much which we feel to be wrong it regards as good. Our jewels are its tinsel, and its jewels are our tinsel. We and it stand in diametrical opposition in thought about God, about self, about duty, about life, about death, about the future; and that opposition goes right down to the bottom of things. However it may be covered over, there is a gulf, as in some of those American cañons: the towering banks may be very near—only a yard or two seems to separate them; but they go down for thousands and thousands of feet, and never get any nearer each other, and between them at the bottom a black, sullen river flows. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own." If it loves you, it is because ye are of it.

II.—And so note, secondly, how this hostility is masked and modified.

There are a great many other bonds that unite men together besides the bonds of religious life or its absence. There are the domestic ties, there are the associations of commerce and neighbourhood. There

are surface identities of opinion about many important things. The greater portion of our lives moves on this surface, where all men are alike. "If you tickle us, do we not laugh; if you wound us, do we not bleed?" We have all the same affections and needs, pursue the same avocations, do the same sort of things, and a large portion of everybody's life is under the dominion of habit and custom, and determined by external circumstances. So there is a film of roofing thrown over the gulf. You can make up a crack in a wall with plaster after a fashion, and it will hide the solution of continuity that lies beneath. But let bad weather come, and soon the bricks gape apart as before. And so, as soon as we get down below the surface of things and grapple with the real, deep-lying, and formative principles of a life, we come to antagonism, just as they used to come to it long ago, though the form of it has become quite different.

Then there are other causes modifying this hostility. The world has got a dash of Christianity into it since Jesus Christ spoke. We cannot say that it is half Christianized, but some of the issues and remoter consequences of Christianity have permeated the general conscience, and the ethics of the Gospel are largely diffused in such a land as this. Thus Christian men and others have, to a large extent, a common code of morality, as long as you keep on the surface; and not only do a good many things exactly alike, but do a great many things from substantially the same motives, and have the same way of looking at much. And thus the gulf is partly bridged over; and the hostility takes another form. We do not wrap Christians in pitch and stick them up for candles in the

emperor's garden nowadays, but the same thing can be done in different ways. Newspaper articles, the light laugh of scorn, the whoop of exultation over the failures or faults of any prominent man that has stood out boldly on Christ's side; all these indicate what lies below the surface, and sometimes not so very far below. Many a young man in a Manchester warehouse, trying to live a godly life, many a workman at his bench, many a commercial traveller in the inn or on the road, many a student on the college benches, has to find out that there is a great gulf between him and the man that sits close to him; and that he cannot be faithful to his Lord, and at the same time, down to the depths of his being, a friend of one who has no friendship to his Master.

Still another thing masks the antagonism, and that is that, after all, the world, meaning thereby the aggregate of godless men, has a conscience that responds to goodness, though grumblingly and reluctantly. After all, men do know that it is better to be good, that it is better and wiser to be like Christ, that it is nobler to live for Him than for self, and that cannot but modify to some extent the manifestations of the hostility. But it is there all the same. And whosoever will be a Christian after Christ's pattern will find out that it is there.

Let a man for Christ's sake avow unpopular beliefs, let him try honestly to act out the New Testament, let him boldly seek to apply Christian principles to the fashionable and popular sins of his class or of his country, let him in any way be ahead of the conscience of the majority, and what a chorus will be yelping at his heels! Dear brethren, the law remains still, If

any man will be a friend of the world he is at enmity with God.

III.—Thirdly. Note how you may escape the hostility.

A half-Christianized world and a more than half-secularized Church get on well together. "When they do agree, their agreement is wonderful." And it is a miserable thing to reflect that about the average Christianity of this generation there is so very little that does deserve the antagonism of the Church. Why should the world care to hate or trouble itself about a professing Church, large parts of which are only a bit of the world under another name? There is no need whatever that there should be any antagonism at all between a godless world and hosts of professing Christians. If you want to escape the hostility drop your flag, button your coat over the badge that shows that you belong to Christ, and do the thing that the people round about you do, and you will have a perfectly easy and undisturbed life.

Of course, in the bad old slavery days, a Christianity that had not a word to say about the sin of slaveholding ran no risk of being tarred and feathered. Of course, a Christianity in Manchester that winks hard at commercial immoralities is very welcome on the Exchange. Of course, a Christianity that lets beer barrels alone may reckon upon having publicans for its adherents. Of course a Christianity that blesses flags and sings *Te Deums* over victories will get its share of the spoil. Why should the world hate, or persecute, or do anything but despise a Christianity like that, any more than a man need to care for a tame tiger that has had its claws pared? If the

world can put a hook in the nostrils of leviathan, and make him play with its maidens, it will substitute good-nature, half contemptuous, for the hostility which our Master here predicts. It was out-and-out Christians that He said the world would hate; the world likes Christians that are like itself. Christian men and women! be you sure that you deserve the hostility which my text predicts.

IV.—And now, lastly, note how to meet this antagonism.

Reckon it as a sign and test of our true union with Jesus Christ. And so, if ever, by reason of our passing at the call of duty or benevolence outside the circle of those who sympathize with our faith and fundamental ideas, we encounter it more manifestly than when we dwell among our own people, let us count the reproach of Christ as a treasure to be proud of, and to be guarded.

Be sure that it is your goodness and not your evils or your weakness, that men dislike. The world has a very keen eye for the inconsistencies and the faults of professing Christians, and it is a good thing that it has. The loftier your profession the sharper the judgment that is applied to you. Many well-meaning, Christian people, by an injudicious use of Christian phraseology in the wrong place, and by the glaring disproportion between their prayers and their talks and their daily life, bring down a great deal of deserved hostility upon themselves and of discredit upon Christianity; and then they comfort themselves and say they are bearing the reproach of the Cross. Not a bit of it. They are bearing the natural results of their own failings and faults. And

it is for us to see to it that what provokes, if it does provoke, the hostile judgments and uncharitable criticisms, insulting speeches and sarcasms, and the sense of our belonging to another regiment and having other objects, is our cleaving to Jesus Christ, and not the imperfections and the sins with which we so often spoil that cleaving. Be you careful for this, that it is Christ in you that men turn from, and not you yourself and your weakness and sin.

Meet this antagonism by not dropping your standard one inch. Keep the flag right at the masthead. If you begin to haul it down, where are you going to stop? Nowhere, until you have got it dragging in the mud at the foot. It is no use trying to conciliate by compromise. All that we shall gain by that will be, as I have said, indifference and contempt; all that we shall gain will be a loss to the cause. A great deal is said in this day, and many efforts are being made—I cannot but think mistaken efforts—by Christian people to bridge over this gulf in the wrong way—that is, by trying to make out that Christianity in its fundamental principles does approximate a great deal more closely to the things that the world goes by than it really does. It is all vain, and the only issue of it will be that we shall have a decaying Christianity and a dying spiritual life. Keep the flag up; emphasize and accentuate the things that the world disbelieves and denies, not pushing them to the “falsehood of extremes,” but not one jot diminishing the clearness of our testimony by reason of the world’s unwillingness to receive it. The only victory is to be won through absolute faithfulness.

And, lastly, meet hostility with unmoved, patient,

Christlike, and Christ-derived love and sympathy. The patient sunshine pours upon the glaciers and melts the thick-ribbed ice at last into sweet water. The patient sunshine beats upon the mist-cloud and breaks up its edges and scatters it at the last. And our Lord here tells us that our experience, if we are faithful to Him, will be like His experience, in that some will hearken to our word though others will persecute, and to some our testimony will come as a message from God that draws them to the Lord Himself. These are our only weapons, brethren. The only conqueror of the world is the love that was in Christ breathed through us; the only victory over suspicion, contempt, alienation, is pleading, persistent, long-suffering, self-denying love. The only way to overcome the world's hostility is by turning the world into a church, and that can only be done when Christ's servants oppose pity to wrath, love to hate, and, in the strength of His life who has won us all by the same process, seek to win the world for Him by the manifestation of His victorious love in our patient love.

Dear brethren, to which army do you belong? Which community is yours? Are you in Christ's ranks, or are you in the world's? Do you love Him back again, or do you meet His open heart with a closed one, and His hand, laden with blessings, with hands clenched in refusal? To which class do I belong? It is the question of questions for us all; and I pray that you and I, won from our hatred by His love, and wooed out of our death by His life, and made partakers of His life by His death, may yield our hearts to Him, and so pass from out of the hostility and mistrust of a godless

world into the friendships and peace of the sheltering Vine. And then we "shall esteem the reproach of Christ" if it fall upon our heads, in however modified and mild a form, "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," and "have respect unto the recompense of the reward."

May it be so with us all !



The World's Hatred, as Christ saw it.

- “But all these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake, because they know not Him that sent Me.
- “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin ; but now they have no cloke for their sin.
- “He that hateth Me hateth My Father also.
- “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not sin ; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.
- “But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause.”—JOHN xv. 21—25.



OUR Lord has been speaking of the world’s hostility to His followers, and tracing that to its hostility to Himself. In these solemn words of our text He goes still deeper, and parallels the relation which His disciples bear to Him and the consequent hostility that falls on them to the relation which He bears to the Father and the consequent hostility that falls on Him. “They hate you because they hate Me.” And then His words become sadder and pierce deeper, and with a tone of wounded love and disappointed effort, and almost surprise at the world’s requital to Him, He goes on to say, “They hate Me, because they hate the Father.”

So, then, here we have, in very pathetic and solemn words, Christ's view of the relation of the world to Him and to God.

I.—The first point that He signalizes is the world's ignorance.

"These things they will do unto you," and they will do them "for My name's sake;" they will do them "because they know not Him that sent Me."

"The world," in Christ's language, is the aggregate of godless men. Or, to put it a little more sharply, our Lord, in this context, gives in His full adhesion to that narrow view which divides those that have come under the influence of His truth into two portions. There is no mincing of the matter in the antithesis which Christ here draws; no hesitation, as if there were a great central mass, too bad for a blessing perhaps, but too good for a curse; which was neither black nor white, but neutral grey. No! however it may be with the masses beyond the reach of the dividing and revealing power of His truth, the men that come into contact with Him, like a heap of metal filings brought into contact with a magnet, mass themselves into two bunches, the one those who yield to the attraction, and the other those who do not. The one is "My disciples," and the other is "the world." And now, says Jesus Christ, all that mass that stands apart from Him, and, having looked upon Him with the superficial eye of those men round about Him at that day, or of the men who hear of Him now, have no real love to Him—have, as the underlying motive of their conduct and their feelings, a real ignorance of God. "They know not Him that sent Me."

Our Lord assumes that He is so completely the

copy and revealer of the Divine nature as that any man that looks upon Him has had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with God, and that any man who turns away from Him has lost that opportunity. The God that the men who do not love Jesus Christ believe in is not the Father that sent Him. It is a fragment, a distorted image tinted by the lens. The world has its conception of God ; but, outside of Jesus Christ and His manifestation of the whole Divine name, the world's God is but a syllable, a fragment, a broken part of the perfect completeness. "The Father of an infinite majesty," and of as infinite a tenderness, the stooping God, the pitying God, the forgiving God, the loving God is known only where Christ is accepted. In other hearts He may be dimly hoped for, in other hearts He may be half believed in, in other hearts He may be thought possible ; but hope, and anticipations and fears and doubts are not knowledge, and they who see not the light in Christ see but the darkness. Out of Him God is not known, and they that turn away from His beneficent manifestation turn their faces to the black North, from which no light can shine. Brother, do you know God in Christ ? Unless you do, you do not know the God who is.

But there is a deeper meaning in that word than simply the possession of true thoughts concerning the Divine nature. We know God as we know one another ; because God is a Person, as we are persons, and the only way to know persons is through familiar acquaintance and sympathy. So the world which turns away from Christ has no acquaintance with God.

This is a surface fact. Our Lord goes on to show what lies below it.

II.—His second thought here is—the world's ignorance in the face of Christ's light is worse than ignorance ; it is sin.

Mark how He speaks: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloke for their sin." And then again: "If I had not done amongst them the works which none other men did, they had not had sin." So then He puts before us two forms of His manifestation of the Divine nature, by His words and His works. Of these two He puts His words foremost, as being a deeper and more precious and brilliant revelation of what God is than the miracles. They are subordinate, they come as a second source of illumination. Men that will not see the beauty and listen to the truth that lie in His word may perchance be led by the deed. But the word towers in its nature high above the work, and the miracle to the word is but like the picture in the child's book to the text, fit for feeble eyes and infantile judgments, but containing far less of the revelation of God than the sacred words which He speaks. First the word, next the miracles.

But notice, too, how decisively, and yet simply and humbly and sorrowfully, our Lord here makes a claim which, on the lips of any but Himself, would have been mere madness of presumption. Think of any of us saying that our words made all the difference between innocent ignorance and criminality! Think of any of us saying that to listen to us, and not be persuaded, was the sin of sins! Think of any of us pointing to our actions and saying, In these God is so manifest that not to see Him augurs wickedness, and

is condemnation! And yet Jesus Christ says all this. And, what is more wonderful, nobody wonders that He says it, and the world believes that He is saying the truth when He says it.

How does that come? There is only one answer; only one. His words were the illuminating manifestation of God, and His deeds were the plain and unambiguous operation of the Divine hand then and there, only because He Himself was Divine, and in Him God was manifested in the flesh.

But, passing from that, notice how our Lord here declares that in comparison with the sin of not listening to His words, and being taught by His manifestation, all other sins dwindle into nothing. "If I had not spoken, they had not had sin." That does not mean, of course, that these men would have been clear of all moral delinquency; it does not mean that there would not have been amongst them crimes against their own consciences, crimes against the law written on their own hearts, crimes against the law of revelation. There were liars, impure men, selfish men, and men committing all the ordinary forms of human transgression amongst them. And yet, says Christ, black and spattered as these natures are, they are white in comparison with the blackness of the man that, looking into His face, sees nothing there that he should desire. Beside the mountain belching out its sulphurous flame the little pimple of a molehill is nought. And so, says Christ, heaven heads the count of sins with this—unbelief in Me.

Ah! brother, as light grows responsibility grows, and this is the misery of all illumination that comes through Jesus Christ, that where it does not draw a

man into His sweet love, and fill him with the knowledge of God which is eternal life, it darkens His nature and aggravates His condemnation, and lays a heavier burden upon the soul. The truth that the measure of light is the measure of guilt has many aspects. It turns a face of alleviation to the dark places of the earth ; but, just in the measure that it lightens the condemnation of the heathen, it adds weight to the condemnation of you men and women who are bathed in the light of Christianity, and all your days have had it streaming in upon you. The measure of the guilt is the brightness of the light. No shadows are so black as those which the intense sunshine at the tropics casts. And you and I live in the very tropical regions of Divine revelation, and if we turn away from Him that spoke on earth and speaketh from heaven, of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall we be thought worthy than those who live away out in the glimmering twilight of an unevangelized Paganism, or who stood by the side of Jesus Christ when they had only His earthly life to teach them ?

III.—The ignorance which is sin is the manifestation of hatred.

Our Lord has sorrowfully contemplated the not knowing God, which in the blaze of His light can only come from wilful closing of the eyes, and is therefore the very sin of sins. But that, sad as it is, is not all which has to be said about that blindness of unbelief in Him. It indicates a rooted alienation of heart and mind and will from God, and is, in fact, the manifestation of an unconscious but real hatred. It is an awful saying, and one which the lips into which grace was

poured could not pronounce without a sigh. But it is our wisdom to listen to what it was His mercy to say.

Observe our Lord's identification of Himself with the Father, so as that the feelings with which men regard Him are, *ipso facto*, the feelings with which they regard the Father God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "He that hath loved Me hath loved the Father." "He that hath hated Me hath hated the Father." An ugly word—a word that a great many of us think far too severe and harsh to be applied to men who simply are indifferent to the Divine love. Some say, "I am conscious of no hatred. I do not pretend to be a Christian, but I do not hate God. Take the ordinary run of people round about us in the world; if you say God is not in all their thoughts, I agree with you; but if you say that they *hate* God, I do not believe it."

Well, what do you think the fact that men go through their days and weeks and months and years, and have *not* God in all their thoughts, indicates as to the central feeling of their hearts towards God? Granted that there is not actual antagonism, because there is no thought at all, do you think it would be possible for a man that loved God to go on for a twelvemonth and never think of, or care to please, or desire to be near, the object that he loved? And inasmuch as, deep down at the bottom of our moral being, there is no such thing possible as indifference and a perfect equipoise in reference to God, it is clear enough, I think, that—although the word must not be pressed as if it meant conscious and active antagonism—where there is no love there is hate.

If a man does not love God as He is revealed to him in Jesus Christ, he neither cares to please Him nor to think about Him, nor does he order his life in obedience to His commands. And if it be true that obedience is the very lifebreath of love, disobedience or non-obedience are the manifestation of antagonism, and antagonism towards God is the same thing as hate.

Oh! dear friends, I want some of my hearers to-day who have never asked themselves honestly the question of what their relation to God is, to go down into the deep places of their hearts and test themselves by this simple inquiry: "Do I do anything to please Him?" Do I try to serve Him? Is it a joy to me to be near Him? Is the thought of Him a delight, like a fountain in the desert or the cool shadow of a great rock in the blazing wilderness? Do I turn to Him as my Home, my Friend, my All? If I do not, am I not deceiving myself by fancying that I stand neutral? There is no neutrality in a man's relation to God. It is one thing or other. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." "The friendship of the world is enmity against God."

IV.—And now, lastly, note how our Lord here touches the deep thought that this ignorance which is sin, and is more properly named hatred, is utterly irrational and causeless. "All this will they do that it might be fulfilled which is written in their law, they hated Me without a cause."

One hears sighing through these words the Master's meek wonder that His love should be so met, and that the requital which He receives at men's hands, for such an unexampled and lavish outpouring of it, should be

such a carelessness, reposing upon a hidden basis of such a rooted alienation.

“Without a cause.” Yes! that suggests the deep thought that the most mysterious and irrational thing in men’s whole history and experience is the way in which they recompense God in Christ for what He has done for them. “Be astonished, O ye heavens! and wonder, O ye earth!” said one of the old prophets; the mystery of mysteries, which can give no account of itself to satisfy the reason, which has no apology, excuse, or vindication, is just that when God loves me I do not love Him back again; and that when Christ pours out the whole fulness of His heart upon me, my dull and obstinate heart gives back so little to Him who has given me so much.

“Without a cause.” Think of that Cross; think, as every poor creature on earth has a right to think, that he and she individually were in the mind and heart of the Saviour when He suffered and died, and then think of what we have brought Him for it. Do we not stand ashamed at—if I might use so trivial a word—the absurdity as well as at the criminality of our requital? Causeless love on the one side, occasioned by nothing but itself, and causeless indifference on the other, occasioned by nothing but itself, are the two powers that meet in this mystery—men’s rejection of the infinite love of God.

Oh! brother, come away from the unreasonable people, come away from the men that can give no account of their attitude. Come away from those who pay benefits by carelessness, and a Love that died, by an indifference that will not cast an eye upon that miracle of mercy, and let His love kindle the

answering flame in your hearts. Then you will know God as only they who love Christ know Him, and in the sweetness of a mutual bond will lose the misery of self, and escape the deepening condemnation of those who see Christ on the Cross and do not care for the sight, nor learn by it to know the infinite tenderness and holiness of the Father that sent Him.



XXIII.

The Defence against a Hostile World.

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.”—JOHN xv. 26, 27.



OUR Lord has been speaking of a world hostile to His followers and to Him. He proceeds, in the words which immediately follow our text, to paint that hostility as aggravated even to the pitch of religious murder. But here He lets a beam of light in upon the darkness. These forlorn twelve, listening to Him, might well have said, “Thou art about to leave us; how can we alone face this world in arms, with which Thou dost terrify us?” And here He lets them see that they will not be left alone, but have a great Champion, clad in celestial armour, who, coming straight from God, will be with them and put into their hands a weapon, with which they may conquer the world, and turn it into a friend, and with which alone they must meet the world’s hate.

So, then, we have three things in this text, the great promise of an Ally in the conflict with the world; the witness which that Ally bears, to fortify against the world; and the consequent witness with which Christians may win the world.

I.—Now consider briefly the first of these points, the great promise of an Ally, in the conflict with the world.

I may touch upon the wonderful designation of this Champion-Friend whom Christ sends, very lightly, because on former occasions in this course of sermons we have had to deal with the same thoughts, and there will be subsequent opportunities of recurring to them. But I may just emphasize in a few sentences the points which our Lord here signalizes in regard of the Champion whom He sends. There is a double designation of that Spirit, "the Comforter" and the "Spirit of Truth." There is a double description of His mission, as being "sent" by Jesus, and as "proceeding from the Father." And there is a single statement as to the position from which He comes to us. A word about each of these things.

I have already explained in former sermons that the notion of Comforter, as it is understood in modern English, is a great deal too restricted and narrow to cover the whole ground of this great and blessed promise. The Comforter whom Christ sends is no mere dryer of men's tears and gentle Consoler of human sorrows, but He is a mightier Spirit than that, and the word by which He is described in our text, which means one who is summoned to the side of another, conveys the idea of a helper who is brought to the man to be helped, in order to render whatever

aid and succour that man's weakness and circumstances may require. The verses before our text suggest what sort of aid and succour the disciples will need. They are to be as sheep in the midst of wolves. Their defenceless purity will need a Protector, a strong Shepherd. They stand alone amongst enemies. There must be someone beside them to fight for them, to shield and to encourage them, to be their safety and their peace. And that Paraclete, who is called to our side, comes for the special help which these special circumstances require, and is a strong Spirit who will be our Champion and our Ally, whatever antagonism may storm against us, and however strong and well-armed may be the assaulting legions of the world's hate.

Then, still further, the other designation here of this strong Succourer and Friend is "the Spirit of truth," by which is designated, not so much His characteristic attribute as rather the weapon which He wields, or the material with which He works. The "truth" is His instrument; that is to say, the Spirit of God sent by Jesus Christ is the Strengtheners, the Encourager, the Comforter, the Fighter for us and with us, because He wields that great body of truth, the perfect revelation of God, and man, and duty, and salvation, which is embodied in the Incarnation and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is His weapon, and it is by it that He makes us strong.

Then, still further, there is a twofold description here of the mission of this Divine Champion, as "sent" by Christ, and "proceeding from the Father."

In regard to the former I need only remind you

that, in a previous part of this wonderful discourse, our Lord speaks of that Divine Spirit as being sent by the Father in His name and in answer to His prayer. The representation here is by no means antagonistic to, or diverse from, that other representation, but rather the fact that the Father and the Son, according to the deep teaching of Scripture, are in so far one as that "whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do that also the Son doeth likewise," makes it possible to attribute to Him the work which, in another place, is ascribed to the Father. We speak of the *Persons* of the Deity, let us never forget that that word is only partially applicable to that ineffable relation, and that whilst with us it means absolute separation of the individuals, it does not mean such separation in the case of its imperfect transference to the mysteries of the Divine nature. But rather the Son doeth what the Father doeth, and therefore the Spirit is sent forth by the Father, and also the Son sends the Spirit.

But, on the other hand, we are not to regard that Divine Spirit as merely a Messenger sent by another. He "proceeds from the Father." That word has been the battlefield of theological controversy, with which I do not purpose to trouble you now. For I do not suppose that in its use here it refers at all to the subject to which it has been sometimes applied, nor contains any kind of revelation of the eternal depths of the Divine Nature and its relations to itself. What is meant here is the historical coming forth into human life of that Divine Spirit. And, possibly, the word "proceeds" is chosen in order to contrast with the word "sent," and to give the idea

of a voluntary and personal action of the Messenger, who not only is *sent* by the Father, but of Himself *proceeds* on the mighty work to which He is destined.

Be that as it may, mark only, for the last thought here about the details of this great promise, that wonderful phrase, twice repeated in our Lord's words, and emphasised by its verbal repetition in the two clauses, which in all other respects are so different—"from the Father." The word translated "*from*" is not the ordinary word so rendered, but rather designates *a position at the side of* than an *origin from*, and suggests much rather the intimate and ineffable union between Father, Son, and Spirit, than the source from which the Spirit comes. I touch upon these things very lightly, and gather them up into one sentence. Here, then, are the points. A Person who is spoken of as He—a Divine Person whose home from of old has been close by the Father's side—a Person whose instrument is the revealed truth ensphered and in germ in the facts of Christ's Incarnation and life—a Divine Person, wielding the truth, who is sent by Christ as His Representative, and in some sense a continuance of His Personal presence—a Divine, Personal, Spirit coming from the Father, wielding the truth, sent by Christ, and at the side of all the persecuted and the weak, all world-hated and Christian men, as their Champion, their Combatant, their Ally, their Inspiration, and their Power. Is not that enough to make the weakest strong? Is not that enough to make us "more than conquerors through Him that loved us"? All nations have legends of the gods fighting at the head of their armies, and through

the dust of battle the white horses and the shining armour of the celestial champions have been seen. The childish dream is a historical reality. It is not we that fight, it is the Spirit of God that fighteth in us.

II.—And so note, secondly, the witness of the Spirit which fortifies against the world. “He shall bear witness of Me.”

Now we must especially observe here that little phrase, “unto you.” For that tells us at once that the witness which our Lord has in mind here is something which is done within the circle of the Christian believers, and not in the wide field of the world’s history or in nature. Of course it is a great truth that long before Jesus Christ, and to-day far beyond the limits of His name and knowledge, to say nothing of His faith and obedience, the Spirit of God is working. As of old He brooded over the chaotic darkness, ever labouring to turn chaos into order, and darkness into light, and deformity into beauty; so to-day, all over the field of humanity, He is operating. Grand as that truth is, it is not the truth here. What is spoken of here is something that is done in and on Christian men, and not even through them on the world, but in them for themselves. “He shall testify of Me” to you.

Now it is to be noted, also, that the first and special application of these words is to the little group listening to Him. Never were men more desolate and beaten down than these were, in the prospect of Christ’s departure. Never were men more utterly bewildered and dispirited than these were, in the days between His Crucifixion and His Resurrection.

Think of them during His earthly life, their narrow understandings, their manifold faults, moral as well as intellectual. How little perception they had of anything that He said to them, as their own foolish questions abundantly show! How little they had drunk in His Spirit, as their selfish and ambitious janglings amongst themselves abundantly show! They were but Jews like their brethren, believing, indeed, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but not knowing what it was they believed, or of what kind the Messiah was in whom they were thus partially trusting. But they loved Him and were led by Him, and so they were brought into a larger place by the Spirit whom Christ sent.

What was it that made these dwarfs into giants in six weeks? What was it that turned their narrowness into breadth; that made them start up all at once as heroes, and that so swiftly matured them, as the fruits and flowers are ripened under tropical sunshine? The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ had a great deal to do with the change; but they were not all. There is no explanation of the extraordinary transformation of these men as we see them in the pages of the Gospels, and as we find them on the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, except this—the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus Christ as facts, and the Spirit on Pentecost as an indwelling Interpreter of the facts. He came, and the weak became strong, and the foolish wise, and the blind enlightened, and they began to understand—though it needed all their lives to perfect the teaching—what it was that their ignorant hands had grasped and their dim perceptions had seen, when they touched the

hands and looked upon the face of Jesus Christ. The witness of the Spirit of God working within them, working upon what they knew of the historical facts of Christ's life, and interpreting these to them, was the explanation of their change and growth. And the New Testament is the product of that. Christ's life was the truth which the Spirit used, and a product of His teaching was these Epistles which we have, and which for us step into the place which the historical facts held for them, and become the Instrument with which the Spirit of God will deepen our understanding of Christ and enlarge our knowledge of what He is to us.

So, dear friends, whilst here we have a promise which specially applies, no doubt, to these twelve Apostles, and the result of which in them is different from its result in us, inasmuch as the Spirit's teaching, recorded in the New Testament, becomes for us the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the promise still applies to each of us in a secondary and modified sense. For there is nothing in these great valedictory words of our Lord's which has not a universal bearing, and is not the revelation of a permanent truth in regard to the Christian Church. And, therefore, here we have the promise of a universal gift to all Christian men and women, of an actual Divine Spirit to dwell with each of us, to speak in our hearts.

And what will He do there? He will teach us a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ. He will help us to understand better what He is. He will show us more and more of the whole sweep of His work, of the whole infinite truth for morals and religion, for politics and society, for time and for eternity, about men and

about God, which is wrapped up in that great saying which we first of all, perhaps under the pressure of our own sense of sin, grasp as our deliverance from sin: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That is the sum of truth which the Spirit of God interprets to every faithful heart. And as the days roll on, and new problems rise, and new difficulties present themselves, and new circumstances emerge in our personal life, we find the truth, which we at first dimly grasped as life and salvation, opening out into wisdom and depth and meaning that we never dreamed of in the early hours. A Spirit that bears witness of Christ and will make us understand Him better every day we live, if we choose, is the promise that we have here, for all Christian men and women.

Then, note that this inward witness of Christ's depth and preciousness is the true weapon and stay against a hostile world. A little candle in a room will make the lightning outside almost invisible; and if I have burning in my heart the inward experience and conviction of what Jesus Christ is and what He has done and will do for me—oh, then, all the storm without may rage, and it will not trouble us.

If you take an empty vessel and bring pressure to bear upon it, in go the sides. Fill it, and they will resist the pressure. So with growing knowledge of Christ, and growing personal experience of His sweetness in our souls, we shall be able to throw off, untouched and undinted, the pressure which would otherwise have crushed us.

Therefore, dear friends, here is the true secret of

tranquillity, in an age of questioning and doubt. Let me have that Divine voice speaking in my heart, as I may have, and no matter what questions may be doubtful, this is sure—"We know in whom we have believed"; and we can say, "Settle all your controversies any way you like: one thing I know, and that Divine voice is ever saying it to me in my deepest consciousness—the Son of God is come and hath given us understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true." Labour for more of this inward, personal conviction of the preciousness of Jesus Christ to strengthen you against a hostile world.

And remember that there are conditions under which this Voice speaks in our souls. One is that we attend to the instrument which the Spirit of God uses, and that is "the truth." If Christians will not read their Bibles, they need not expect to have the words of these Bibles interpreted and made real to them by any inward experience. If you want to have a faith which is vindicated and warranted by your daily experience, there is only one way to get it, and that is, to use the truth which the Spirit uses, and to bring yourself into contact, continual and reverent and intelligent, with the great body of Divine truth that is conveyed in these authoritative words of the Spirit of God speaking through the first witnesses.

And there must be moral discipline too. Laziness, worldliness, the absorption of attention with other things, self-conceit, prejudice, and, I was going to say, almost above all, the taking of our religion and religious opinions at secondhand from men and teachers and books—all these stand in the way of our

hearing the Spirit of God when He speaks. Come away from the babble and go by yourself, and take your Bibles with you, and read them, and meditate upon them, and get near the Master of whom they speak, and the Spirit which uses the truth will use it to fortify you.

III.—And, lastly, note the consequent witness with which the Christian may win the world. “And ye also shall bear witness of Me because ye have been with Me from the beginning.” That *also* has, of course, direct reference to the Apostles’ witness to the facts of our Lord’s historical appearance, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension; and therefore their qualification was simply the companionship with Him which enabled them to say, “We saw what we tell you; we were witnesses from the beginning.”

But then, again, I say that there is no word here that belongs only to the Apostles; it belongs to us all, and so here is the task of the Christian Church in all its members. They receive the witness of the Spirit, and they are Christ’s witnesses in the world.

Note what we have to do—to bear witness; not to argue, not to adorn, but simply to attest. Note what we have to attest—the fact, not of the historical life of Jesus Christ, because we are not in a position to be witnesses of that, but the fact of His preciousness and power, and the fact of our own experience of what He has done for us. Note that that is by far the most powerful agency for winning the world. You can never make men angry by saying to them, “We have found the Messias.” You cannot irritate people, or provoke them into a controversial opposition when you say, “Brother! let me tell you my experience. I was

dark, sad, sinful, weak, solitary, miserable; and I got light, gladness, pardon, strength, companionship, and a joyful hope. I was blind—you remember me when my eyes were dark, and I sat begging outside the Temple; I was blind, now I see—look at my eyeballs.” We can all say that. This is the witness that needs no eloquence, no genius, no anything except honesty and experience; and whosoever has tasted and felt and handled of the Word of Life may surely go to a brother and say, “Brother! I have eaten and am satisfied. Will you not help yourselves?” We can all do it, and we ought to do it. The Christian privilege of being witnessed to by the Spirit of God in our hearts brings with it the Christian duty of being witnesses in our turn to the world. That is our only weapon against the hostility which godless humanity bears to ourselves and to our Master. We may win men by that; we can win them by nothing else. “Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servants whom I have chosen.” Oh! brother, Christian friend! listen to the Master, who says, “Him that confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father in heaven.”



Christ's Reasons for Present Speech and Former Silence.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues ; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go My way to Him that sent Me ; and none of you asketh Me. Whither goest Thou ? But because I have said these things unto you sorrow hath filled your heart."—JOHN xvi. 1—6.



THE unbroken flow of thought, and the many subtle links of connection between the parts, of these inexhaustible last words of our Lord make any attempt at grouping them into sections more or less unsatisfactory and artificial. But I have ventured to throw these, perhaps too many, verses together for our consideration now, because a phrase of frequent recurrence in them manifestly affords a key to their main subject. Notice how our Lord four times repeats the expression, "these things

have I spoken unto you." He is not so much adding anything new to His words, as rather contemplating the reasons for His speech now, the reasons for His silence before, and the imperfect apprehension of the things spoken which His disciples had, and which led to their making His announcement, thus imperfectly understood, an occasion for sorrow rather than for joy. There is a kind of landing-place or pause here in the ascending staircase. Our Lord meditates for Himself, and invites us to meditate with Him, rather upon His past utterances than upon anything additional to them. So, then, whilst it is true that we have in two of these verses a repetition, in a somewhat more intense and detailed form, of the previous warnings of the hostility of the world, in the main the subject of the present section is that which I have indicated. And I take the fourfold recurrence of that clause to which I have pointed as marking out for us the main ideas that we are to gather from these words.

I.—There is, first, our Lord's loving reason for His speech.

This is given in a double form. "These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended." And, again, "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them." These two statements substantially coalesce and point to the same idea.

They are separated, as I have said, by a reiteration; in more emphatic form, of the dark prospect which He has been holding out to His disciples. He tells them that the world which hates them is to be fully identified with the apostate Jewish Church. "The

synagogue" is for them "the world." There is a solemn lesson in that. The organized body that calls itself God's Church and House may become the most rampant enemy of Christ's people, and be the truest embodiment on the face of the earth, of all that He means by "the world." A formal church is the true world always; and to-day as then. And such a body will do the cruellest things and believe that it is offering up Christ's witnesses as sacrifices to God. That is partly an aggravation, and partly an alleviation of the sin. It is possible that the inquisitor and the man in the *San Benito* whom he ties to the stake may shake hands yet, at His side up yonder. But a church which has become the world will do its persecution and think that it is worship, and call the burning of God's people an *auto-da-fe* (act of faith); and the bottom of it all is that, in the blaze of light, and calling themselves God's, "they do not know" either God or Christ. They do not know the one because they will not know the other.

But that is all parenthetical in the present section, and so I say nothing more about it; and ask you, rather, just to look at the loving reasons which Christ here suggests for His present speech—"that ye should not be offended," or stumble. He warns them of the storm before it bursts, lest, when it bursts, it should sweep them away from their moorings. Of course, there could be nothing more productive of intellectual bewilderment, and more likely to lead to doubt as to one's own convictions, than to find oneself at odds with the synagogue about the question of the Messiah. A modest man might naturally say, "Perhaps I am wrong and they are right." A coward

would be sure to say, "I will sink my convictions and fall in with the majority." The stumbling-block for these first Jewish converts in the attitude of the whole mass of the nation towards Christ and His pretensions, is one of such a magnitude as we cannot, by any exercise of our imagination, realize. And, says Christ, "the only way by which you will ever get over the temptation to intellectual doubt or to cowardly apostasy that arises from your being thrown out of sympathy with the whole mass of your people, and the traditions of the generations, is to reflect that I told you it would be so, before it came to pass."

Of course, all that has a special bearing upon those to whom it was originally addressed, and then it has a secondary bearing upon Christians, whose lot it is to live in a time of actual persecution. But that does not in the slightest degree destroy the fact that it also has a bearing upon every one of us. For, if you and I are Christian people, and trying to live like our Master, and to do as He would have us to do, we, too, shall often have to stand in such a very small minority, and be surrounded by people who take such an entirely opposite view of duty and of truth, as that we shall be only too much disposed to give up and falter in the clearness, fulness, and braveness of our utterance, and say, "Well, perhaps after all it is better for me to hold my tongue."

And then, besides this, there are all the cares and griefs which befall each of us, with regard to which also, as well as with regard to the difficulties and dangers and oppositions which we may meet with in a faithful Christian life, the principles of my text have a distinct and direct application. He has told us in

order that we might not stumble, because when the hour comes and the sorrow comes with it, we remember that He told us all about it before.

It is one of the characteristics of Christianity that Jesus Christ does not try to enlist recruits by highly-coloured, rosy pictures of the blessing and joy of serving Him, keeping His hand all the while upon the weary marches and the wounds and pains. He tells us plainly at the beginning, "If you take My yoke upon you, you will have to carry a heavy burden. You will have to abstain from a great many things that you would like to do. You will have to do a great many things that your flesh will not like." The road is rough, and a high wall on each side. There are lovely flowers and green pastures on the other side of the hedge, where it is a great deal easier walking upon the short grass than it is upon the stony path. The roadway is narrow, and the gateway is very strait, but the track goes steadily up. Will you accept the terms and come in and walk upon it?

It is far better and nobler, and more attractive also, to tell frankly and fully the difficulties and dangers than to try to coax us by dwelling on pleasures and ease. Jesus Christ will have no service on false pretences, but will let us understand at the beginning that if we serve under His flag we have to make up our minds to hardships which otherwise we may escape, to antagonisms which otherwise will not be provoked, and to more than an ordinary share of sorrow and suffering and pain. Through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom.

And the way by which all these troubles and cares, whether they be those incident and peculiar to Chris-

tian life, or those common to humanity, can best be met and overcome, is precisely by this thought, "The Master has told us before." Sorrows anticipated are more easily met. It is when the vessel is caught with all its sails set that it is almost sure to go down, and, at all events, sure to be badly damaged in the typhoon. But when the barometer has been watched, and its fall has given warning, and everything movable has been made fast, and every spare yard has been sent below, and all tightened up and ship-shape—then she can ride out the storm. Forewarned is forearmed. Savages think, when an eclipse comes, that a wolf has swallowed the sun, and it will never come out again. We know that it has all been calculated beforehand, and, since we know that it is coming to-morrow, when it does come, it is only a passing darkness. Sorrow anticipated is sorrow half overcome; and when it falls on us, the bewilderment, as if "some strange thing had happened," will be escaped, when we can remember that the Master has told us it all beforehand.

And again, sorrow foretold gives us confidence in our Guide. We have the chart, and as we look upon it we see marked "waterless country," "pathless rocks," "desert and sand," "wells and palm trees." Well, when we come to the first of these, and find ourselves, as the map says, in the waterless country; and when, as we go on step by step, and mile after mile, we find that it is all down there, we say to ourselves, "The remainder will be accurate, too." And if we are in Marah to-day, where the water is bitter, and nothing but the wood of the tree that grows there can ever sweeten it, we shall be at Elim to-morrow, where there are the twelve wells and the seventy palm

trees. The chart is right, and the chart says that the end of it all is the land that flows with milk and honey. He *has* told us *this*; if there had been anything worse than this, He would have told us *that*. "If it were not so I would have told you." The sorrow foretold deepens our confidence in our Guide.

Sorrow that comes punctually in accordance with His word plainly comes in obedience to His will. Our Lord uses a little word in this context which is very significant. He says, "when *their hour* is come."

"Their hour"—the time allotted to them. Allotted by whom? Allotted by Him. He could tell that they would come, because it was as His instruments that they came. "Their time" was His appointment. It was only an "hour," a definite, appointed, and brief period in accordance with His loving purpose. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year; and after all the sorts of weathers are run out, the year's results are realized and the calm comes. And so the good old hymn, with its rhythm that speaks at once of fear and triumph, has caught the true meaning of these words of our Lord's—

Why should I complain
Of want or distress,
Temptation or pain?
He told me no less.

"These things have I spoken unto you that ye might not be offended."

II.—Well, still further, note our Lord's loving reasons for past silence. "These things I said not unto you from the beginning, because I was with you."

Of course there had been in his early ministry

hints, and very plain references, to persecutions and trials, but we must not restrict the "these things" of my text to that only, but rather include the whole of the previous chapter, in which He sets the sorrow and the hostility which His servants have to endure in its true light, as being the consequence of their union with Him and of the closeness and the identity of life and fate between the Vine and the branches. In so systematic and detailed fashion, and with such an exhibition of the grounds of its necessity, our Lord had not spoken of the world's hostility in His earlier ministry, but had reserved it to these last moments. And the reason why He had given but passing hints before was because He was there. What a superb confidence that expresses in His ability to shield His poor followers from all that might hurt and harm them! He spreads the ample robe of His protection over them, or rather, to go back to His own metaphor, "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" so He gathers them to His own breast, and stretches over them that which is at once protection and warmth, and keeps them safe. As long as He is there, no harm can come to them. But He is going away, and so it is time to speak, and to speak more plainly.

That, too, yields for us, dear brethren, truths that apply to us quite as much as to that little group of silent listeners. For us, too, difficulties and sorrows, though foretold in general terms, are largely hidden till they are near. It would have been of little use for Christ to have spoken more plainly in those early days of His ministry. The disciples managed to forget and to misunderstand His plain utterances, for instance, about His own death and resurrection.

There needs to be an adaptation between the hearing ear and the spoken word, in order that the word spoken should be of use. And there are great tracts of Scripture dealing with the sorrows of life, which lie perfectly dark and dead to us, until experience vitalizes them. The old Greeks used to send messages from one army to another by means of a roll of parchment twisted spirally round a batôn, and then written upon. It was perfectly unintelligible when it fell into a man's hands that had not a corresponding batôn to twist it upon. Many of Christ's messages to us are like that. You can only understand the utterances when life gives you the frame round which to wrap them, and then they flash up into meaning, and we say at once, "He told us it all before, and I scarcely knew that He had told me, until this moment when I need it."

Oh! it is merciful that there should be a gradual unveiling of what is to come to us, that the road should wind, and that we should see so short a way before us. Did you never say to yourselves, "If I had known all this before, I do not think I could have lived to face it"? And did you not feel how good and kind and loving it was, that in the revelation there had been concealment, and that while Jesus Christ had told us in general terms that we must expect sorrows and trials, this specific form of sorrow and trial had not been foreseen by us until we came close to it? Thank God for the loving reticence, and for the as loving eloquence of His speech and of His silence, with regard to sorrow. And take this further lesson, that there ought to be in all our lives times of close and blessed communion

with that Master, when the sense of His presence with us makes all thought of sorrows and trials in the future, out of place and needlessly disturbing. If these disciples had drunk in the Spirit of Jesus Christ when they were with Him, then they would not have been so bewildered when He left them. When He was near them there was something better for them to do than to be "over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils" in the future—namely, to grow into His life, to drink in the sweetness of His presence, to be moulded into the likeness of His character, to understand Him better, and to realize His nearness more fully. And, dear brethren, for us all there are times—and it is our own fault if these are not very frequent and blessed—when thus, in such an hour of sweet communion with the present Christ, the future will be all radiant and calm, if we look into it, or, better, the present will be so blessed that there will be no need to think of the future. These men in the upper chamber, if they had learnt all the lessons that He was teaching them then, would not have gone out, to sleep in Gethsemane, and to tell lies in the high priest's hall, and to fly like frightened sheep from the Cross, and to despair at the tomb. And you and I, if we sit at His table, and keep our hearts near Him, eating and drinking of that heavenly manna, shall "go in the strength of that meat forty days into the wilderness," and say—

E'en let the unknown morrow
Bring with it what it may.

III.—Lastly, I must touch, for the sake of completeness, upon the final thought in these pregnant

verses, and that is, the imperfect apprehension of our Lord's words, which leads to sorrow instead of joy. "Now I go My way to Him that sent Me, and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart."

He had been telling them—and it was the one definite idea that they gathered from His words—that He was going. And what did they say? They said, "Going! What is to become of *us*?" If there had been a little less selfishness and a little more love, and if they had put their question, "Going! What is to become of *Him*?" then it would not have been sorrow that would have filled their hearts, but a joy that would have flooded out all the sorrow, "and the winter of their discontent" would have been changed into "glorious summer," because He was going to Him that sent Him; that is to say, He was going with His work done and His message accomplished. And therefore, if they could have only looked over their own selves, and the bearing of His departure, as it seemed to them, on themselves, and have thought of it a little as it affected Him, they would have found that all the oppressive and the dark in it would have disappeared, and they would have been glad.

Ah! dear brethren, that gives us a thought on which I can but touch now, that the steadfast contemplation of the ascended Christ, who has gone to the Father, having finished His work, is the sovereign antidote against all sense of separation and solitude, the sovereign power by which we may face a hostile world, the sovereign cure for every sorrow. If

we could live in the light of the great triumphant ascended Lord, then, oh! how small would the babble of a world be. If the great White Throne, and He that sits upon it, was more distinctly before us, then we could face anything, and sorrow would "become a solemn scorn of ills," and all the transitory would be reduced to its proper insignificance, and we should be emancipated from fear and every temptation to unfaithfulness and apostacy. Look up to the Master that has gone, and as the dying martyr outside the city wall "saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing"—having sprung to his feet to help his poor servant—"at the right hand of God," so with that vision in our eyes and the light of that face flashing upon our faces, and making them like the angels', we shall be masters of grief and care, and pain and trial, and enmity and disappointment, and sorrow and sin, and feel that the absent Christ is the present Christ, and that the present Christ is the conquering power in us.

Dear brethren, there is nothing else that will make us victors over the world and ourselves. If we can grasp Him by our faith and keep ourselves near Him, then union with Him as of the Vine and the branches, which will result inevitably in suffering here, will result as inevitably in joy hereafter. For He will never relax the adamantine grasp of His strong hand until He raises us to Himself, and if so be that we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified together.

The Departing Christ and the Coming Spirit.

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you : but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.

“And when He is come, He will *convince* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”—JOHN xvi. 7, 8.



U read these words in the light of all that has gone after, and to us they are familiar and almost threadbare. But if we would appreciate their sublimity, we must think away eighteen centuries, and all Christendom, and recall these eleven poor men and their peasant Leader in the upper room. They were not very wise, nor very strong, and outside these four walls there was scarcely a creature in the whole world that had the least belief either in Him or in them. They had everything against them, and most of all their own hearts. They had nothing for them but their Master's promise. Their eyes had been dimmed by their sorrowful hearts, so that they could not see the truth which He had been trying to reveal to them ; and His departure had presented itself to

them only as it affected themselves, and therefore had brought a sense of loss and desolation.

And now He bids them think of that departure, as it affects themselves, as pure gain. "It is for your profit that I go away." He explains that staggering statement by the thought which He has already presented to them, in varying aspects, of His departure as the occasion for the coming of that Great Comforter, who, when He is come, will through them work upon the world, which knows neither them nor Him. They are to go forth "as sheep in the midst of wolves," but in this promise He tells them that they will become the judges and accusers of the world, which, by the Spirit dwelling in them, they will be able to overcome, and convict of error and of fault.

We must remember that the whole purpose of the words which we are considering now is the strengthening of the disciples in their conflict with the world, and that, therefore, the operations of that Divine Spirit which are here spoken of are operations carried on by their instrumentality and through the word which they spake. With that explanation we can consider the great words before us.

I.—The first thing that strikes me about them is that wonderful thought of the gain to Christ's servants from Christ's departure. "It is expedient for you that I go away."

I need not enlarge here upon what we have had frequent occasion to remark, the manner in which our Lord here represents the complex whole of His death and ascension as being His own voluntary act. He goes. He is neither taken away by death nor rapt up to heaven in a whirlwind, but of His own

exuberant power and by His own will He goes into the region of the grave and thence to the throne. Contrast the story of His ascension with that Old Testament story of the ascension of Elijah. One needed the chariot of fire and the horses of fire to bear him up into the sphere, all foreign to his mortal and earthly manhood; the Other needed no outward power to lift Him, nor any vehicle to carry Him from this dim spot which men call earth, but slowly serenely, upborne by His own indwelling energy, and rising as to His native home, He ascended up on high, and went where the very manner of His going proclaimed that He had been before. "If *I go* away, I will send him."

But that is a digression. What we are concerned with now is the thought of Christ's departure as being a step in advance, and a positive gain, even to these poor, bewildered men who were clustering round Him, depending absolutely upon Himself, and feeling themselves orphaned and helpless without Him.

Now, if we would feel the full force and singularity of this saying of our Lord's, let us put side by side with it that other one, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." Why is it that the Apostle says, "Though I want to go, I am bound to stay?" and why is it that the Master says, "It is for your good that I am going," but because of the essential difference in the relation of the two to the people who are to be left, and in the continuance of the work of the two after they had departed? Paul knew that when he went, whatever befell those whom he loved and would fain help, he

could not stretch a hand to do anything for them. He knew that death dropped the portecullis between him and them, and, whatever their sore need on the one side of the iron gate, he on the other could not succour or save. Jesus Christ said, "It is better for you that I should go," because He knew that all His influences would flow through the grated door unchecked, and that, departed, He would still be the life of them that trusted in Him; and, having left them, would come near them by the very act of leaving them.

And so there is here indicated for us—as we shall have occasion to see more fully presently—in that one singular and anomalous fact of Christ's departure being a positive gain to those that trust in Him, the singularity and uniqueness of His work for them and His relation to them.

The words mean a great deal more than the analogies of our relation to dear ones or great ones, loves or teachers, who have departed, might suggest. Of course we all know that it is quite true that death reveals to the heart the sweetness and the preciousness of the departed ones, and that its refining touch manifests to our blind eyes what we did not see so clearly when they were beside us. We all know that it needs distance to measure men, and the dropping away of the commonplace and the familiar ere we can see the likeness of our contemporaries to the great of old. We have to travel across the plains before we can measure the relative height of the clustered mountains, and discern which is manifestly the loftiest. And all *this* is true in reference to Jesus Christ and His relation to us. But that does not go half-way down to the understanding of such words as these of

my text, which tell us that so singular and solitary is His relation to us that the thing which ends the work of all other men, and begins the decay of their influence, begins for Him a higher form of work and a wider sweep of sway. He is nearer us when He leaves us, and works with us and in us more mightily from the throne than He did upon the earth. Who is He of Whom this is true? And what kind of work is it of which it is true that death continues and perfects it?

So let me note, before I pass on, that there is a great truth here for us. We are accustomed to look back to our Lord's earthly ministry, and to fancy that those who gathered round Him, and heard Him speak, and saw His deeds, were in a better position for loving Him and trusting Him than you and I are. It is all a mistake. We have lost nothing that they had which was worth the keeping; and we have gained a great deal which they had not. We have not to compare our relation to Christ with theirs, as we might do our relation to some great thinker or poet, with that of his contemporaries, but we have Christ in a better form, if I may so speak; and we, on whom the ends of the world are come, may have a deeper and a fuller and a closer intimacy with Him than was possible for men whose perceptions were disturbed by sense, and who had to pierce through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, before they reached the Holy of Holies of His Spirit.

II.—Note, secondly, the coming for which Christ's going was needful, and which makes that going a gain.

"If I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send him unto you."

Now we have already, in former sermons, touched upon many of the themes which would naturally be suggested by these words, and therefore I do not propose to dwell upon them at any length. There is only one point to which I desire to refer briefly here, and that is the necessity which here seems to be laid down by our Lord for His departure, in order that that Divine Spirit may come and dwell with men. That necessity goes down deeper into the mysteries of the Divinity and of the processes and order of Divine revelation than it is given to us to follow. But though we can only speak superficially and fragmentarily about such a matter, let me just remind you, in the briefest possible words, of what Scripture plainly declares to us with regard to this high and, in its fulness, ineffable matter. It tells us that the complete work of Jesus Christ—not merely His coming upon earth, or His life amongst men, but also His sacrificial death upon the cross—was the necessary preliminary, and in some sense procuring, cause of the gift of that Divine Spirit. It tells us—and there we are upon ground on which we can more fully verify the statement—that His work must be completed ere that Spirit can be sent, because the Word is the Spirit's weapon for the world, and the revelation of God in Him must be ended, ere the application of that revelation, which is the Spirit's work, can be begun in its full energy.

It tells us, further (and there our eyesight fails, and we have to accept what we are told), that Jesus Christ must ascend on high and be at the right hand of God, ere He can pour down upon men the fulness of the Spirit which dwelt uncommunicated in Him in the

time of His earthly humiliation. "Thou hast ascended up on high," and therefore "Thou hast given gifts to men." We accept the declaration, not knowing all the deep necessity in the Divine nature on which it rests, but believing it, because He in whom we have confidence has declared it to us.

And we are further told—and there our experience may, in some degree, verify the statement—that only those, in whose hearts there is union to Jesus Christ by faith in His completed work and ascended glory, are capable of receiving that Divine gift. So every way, both as regards the depths of Deity and the processes of revelation, and as regards the power of the humanity of Christ to impart His Spirit, and as regards the capacity of us poor recipients to receive it, the words of my text seem to be confirmed, and we can, though not with full insight, at any rate with full faith, accept the statement, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you."

That coming is gain. It teaches a deeper knowledge of Him. It teaches and gives a fuller possession of the life of righteousness which is like His own. It draws us into the fellowship of the Son.

III.—Lastly, note here the threefold conflict of the Spirit through the Church with the world.

"When He is come He will *convince* the world" in respect "of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." By the "reproof," or rather "conviction," which is spoken about here, is meant the process by which certain facts are borne in upon men's understanding and consciences, and, along with these facts, the conviction of error and fault in reference to them. It is no mere process of demonstration of an

intellectual truth, but it is a process of conviction of error in respect of great moral and religious truth, and of manifestation of the truths in regard to which the error and the sin have been committed. So we have here the triple division of the great work which the Divine Spirit does, through Christian men and women, in the world.

“He shall convince the world of sin.” The outstanding first characteristic of the whole Gospel message is the new gravity which it attaches to the fact of sin, the deeper meaning which it gives to the word, and the larger scope which it shows its blighting influences to have had in humanity. Apart from the conviction of sin by the Spirit using the Word proclaimed by disciples, the world has scarcely a notion of what sin is, its inwardness, its universality, the awfulness of it as a fact affecting man’s whole being and all His relations to God. All these conceptions are especially the product of Christian truth. Without it, what does the world know about the poison of sin? And what does it care about the poison until the conviction has been driven home to the reluctant consciousness of mankind by the Spirit wielding the Word? This conviction comes first in the Divine order. I do not say that the process of turning a man of the world into a member of Christ’s Church always begins, as a matter of fact, with the conviction of sin. I believe it most generally does; but without insisting upon a pedantic adherence to a sequence, and without saying a word about the depth and intensity of such a conviction, I am here to assert that a Christianity which is not based upon the conviction of sin is an impotent Christianity, and

will be of very little use to the men who profess it, and have no power to propagate itself in the world. Everything in our conception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of His work for us depends upon what we think about this primary fact of man's condition, that he is a sinful man. The root of all heresy lies there. Every blunder that has led away men from Jesus Christ and His Cross may be traced up to defective notions of sin and a defective realization of it. If I do not feel as the Bible would have me feel, that I am a sinful man, I shall think differently of Jesus Christ and of my need of Him, and of what He is to me. Christianity may be to me a system of beautiful ethics, a guide for life, a revelation of much precious truth, but it will not be the redemptive power, without which I am lost. And Jesus Christ will be shorn of His brightest beams, unless I see Him as the Redeemer of my soul from sin, which else would destroy and is destroying. Is Christianity merely a better morality? Is it merely a higher revelation of the Divine nature? Or does it *do* something as well as *say* something, and what does it do? Is Jesus Christ only a Teacher, a Wise Man, an Example, a Prophet, or is He the Sacrifice for the sins of the world? Oh! brethren, we must begin where this text begins; and our whole conception of Him and of His work for us must be based upon this fact, that we are sinful and lost, and that Jesus Christ, by His sweet and infinite love and all-powerful sacrifice, is our soul's Redeemer and our only Hope. The world has to be convicted and convinced of sin as the first step to its becoming a Church.

The next step of this Divine Spirit's conviction is

that which corresponds to the consciousness of sin, the dawning upon the darkened soul of the blessed sunrise of righteousness. The triple subjects of conviction must necessarily belong to the world of which our Lord is speaking. It must be the world that is convinced, and it must be the world's sin and the world's righteousness and the world's judgment, of which my text speaks. How, then, can there follow on the conviction of sin as mine a conviction of righteousness as mine? I know but one way, "not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God through faith." When a man is convinced of sin, there will dawn upon the heart the wondrous thought that a righteousness may be his, given to him from above, which will sweep away all his sin and make him righteous as Christ is righteous. That conviction will never awake in its blessed and hope-giving power unless it be preceded by the other. It is of no use to exhibit medicine to a man that does not know himself diseased. It is of no use to talk about righteousness to a man that has not found himself to be a sinner. And it is of as little use to talk of sin to a man unless you are ready to tell him of a righteousness that will cover all his sin. The one conviction without the other is misery; the second without the first is irrelevant and far away.

The world as a world has but dim and inadequate conceptions of what righteousness is. A Pharisee is its type, or a man that keeps a clean life in regard of great transgressions; a whited sepulchre of some sort or other. The world apart from Christ has but languid desires after even the poor righteousness that it understands, and the world apart from Christ is

afflicted by a despairing scepticism as to the possibility of ever being righteous at all. And there are men listening to me now in every one of these three conditions—not caring to be righteous, not understanding what it is to be righteous, and cynically disbelieving that it is possible to be so. My brother, here comes the message to you—first, thou art sinful; second, God's righteousness lies at thy side to take and wear if thou wilt.

The last of these triple convictions is "judgment." If there be in the world these two things, both operating, sin and righteousness, and if the two come together, what then? If there is to be collision, as there must be, which will go down? Christ tells us that this Divine Spirit will teach us that righteousness will triumph over sin, and that there will be a judgment which will destroy that which is the weaker, though it seems the stronger. Now I take it that the judgment which is spoken about here is not merely a future retribution beyond the grave, but that, whilst that is included, and is the principal part of the idea, we are always to regard the judgment of the hereafter as being prepared for by the continual judgment here.

And so there are a blessed thought, and a terrible one, wrapped up in that word—a blessed thought for us sinful men, inasmuch as we may be sure that the Divine righteousness, which is given to us, will judge us and separate us day by day from our sins; and a terrible thought, inasmuch as if I, a sinful man, do not make friends with and ally myself to the Divine righteousness which is proffered to me, I shall one day have to front it on the other side of the flood,

when the contact must necessarily be to me destruction.

Time does not allow me to dwell upon these solemn matters as I fain would, but let me gather all I have been feebly trying to say to you now into one sentence. This threefold conviction, in conscience, understanding, and heart, of sin which is mine, of righteousness which may be mine, and of judgment which must be mine—this threefold conviction is that which makes the world into a Church. It is the message of Christianity to each of us. How do you stand to it? Do you hearken to the Spirit who is striving to convince you of these? Or do you gather yourselves together into an obstinate, close-knit unbelief, or a loose-knit indifference which is as impenetrable? Beware that you resist not the Spirit of God.



XXVI.

The facts which convince the World.

- “Of sin, because they believe not on Me ;
“Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more ;
“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”—
JOHN xvi. 9—11.



OUR Lord has just been telling His disciples how He will equip them, as His champions, for their conflict with the world. A Divine Spirit is coming to them, who will work in them and through them ; and by their simple and unlettered testimony will “convict,” or convince, the mass of ungodly men of error and crime in regard of these three things—sin, righteousness, and judgment.

He now advances to tell them that this threefold conviction which they, as counsel for the prosecution, will establish as against the world at the bar, will be based upon three facts : first, a truth of experience ; second, a truth of history ; third, a truth of revelation, all three facts having reference to Jesus Christ and His relation to men,

Now these three facts are—the world’s unbelief ; Christ’s ascension, and session at the right hand of

God; and the "judgment of the prince of this world." If we remember that what our Lord is here speaking about is the work of a Divine Spirit through the ministration of believing men, then Pentecost with its thousands "pricked to the heart," and the Roman ruler who trembled, as the prisoner "reasoned of righteousness and judgment to come," are illustrations of the way in which the humble disciples towered above the pride and strength of the world, and from criminals at its bar became its accusers.

These three facts are the staple and the strength of the Christian ministry. These three facts are misapprehended, and have failed to produce their right impression, unless they have driven home to our consciences and understandings the triple conviction of my text. And so I come to you with the simple questions which are all-important for each of us: Have you looked these three facts in the face—unbelief; the ascended Christ; a judged prince of the world? and have you learned their meaning as it bears on your own character and religious life?

I.—The first point here is the rejection of Jesus Christ as the climax of the world's sin.

Strange words! They are in some respects the most striking instance of that gigantic self-assertion of our Lord's, of which we have had occasion to see so many examples in these valedictory discourses. The world is all full of unrighteousness and wickedness, lust and immorality, intemperance, cruelty, hatred; all manner of buzzing evils that stink and sting around us. But Jesus Christ passes them all by and points to a mere negative thing, to an inward thing,

to the attitude of men towards Himself; and He says, "If you want to know what sin is, look at that." There is the worst of all sins. There is a typical instance of what sin is, in which, as in some anatomical preparation, you may see all its fibre straightened out and made visible. Look at that if you want to know what the world is, and what the world's sin is.

Some of us do not think it is sin at all; and tell us that man is no more responsible for his belief than he is for the colour of his hair, and such like talk. Well, let me put a very plain question: What is it that a man turns away from when he turns away from Jesus Christ? The plainest, the loveliest, the loftiest, the perfectest revelation of God in His beauty and completeness that ever dawned, or ever will dawn upon creation. He rejects that. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from the loveliest human life that ever was, or will be, lived. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from a miracle of self-sacrificing love, which endured the Cross for enemies, and willingly embraced agony and shame and death for the sake of those who inflicted them upon Him. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from hands laden with, and offering Him, the most precious and needful blessings that a poor soul on earth can desire or expect.

And if this be true, if unbelief in Jesus Christ be indeed all this that I have sketched out, another question arises, What does such an attitude and act indicate as to the rejecter? He stands in the presence of the loveliest revelation of the Divine nature and heart, and he sees no light in it. Why, but because he has blinded his eyes and cannot behold? He is

incapable of seeing God manifest in the flesh, because he loves the darkness rather than the light. He turns away from the revelation of the loveliest and most self-sacrificing love. Why, but because he bears in himself a heart cased with brass and triple steel of selfishness, against the manifestation of love? He turns away from the offered hands heaped with the blessings that he needs. Why, but because he does not care for the gifts that are offered? Forgiveness, cleansing, purity, a heaven which consists in the perfecting of all these, have no attractions for him. The fugitive Israelites in the wilderness said, "We do not want your light, tasteless manna. It may do very well for angels, but we have been accustomed to garlic and onions down in Egypt. They smell strong, and there is some taste in *them*. Give us *them*." And so some of you say, "The offer of pardon is of no use to me, for I am not troubled with my sin. The offer of purity is of no attraction to me, for I rather like the dirt and wallowing in it. The offer of a heaven of that sort is but a dreary prospect to me. And so I turn away from the hands that offer precious things." The man who is blind to the God that beams, lambent and loving, upon him in the face of Jesus Christ—the man who has no stirrings of responsive gratitude for the great outpouring of love upon the cross—the man who does not care for anything that Jesus Christ can give him, surely, in turning away, commits a true sin.

I do not deny, of course, that there may be intellectual difficulties cropping up in connection with the acceptance of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, but as, on the one hand, I am free to admit that many

a man may be putting a true trust in Christ which is joined with a very hesitant grasp of some of the things which, to me, are the very essence and heart of the Gospel; so, on the other side, I would have you remember that there is necessarily a moral quality in our attitude to all moral and religious truth; and that sin does not cease to be sin, because its doer is a thinker or has systematized his rejection into a creed. Though it is not for us to measure motives and to peer into hearts, at the bottom there lies what Christ Himself put His finger on. "*Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.*"

Then, still further, let me remind you that our Lord here presents this fact of man's unbelief as being an instance in which we may see what the real nature of sin is. To use learned language, it is a "typical" sin. In all other acts of sin you get the poison manipulated into various forms, associated with other elements, disguised more or less. But here, because it is purely an inward act having relation to Jesus Christ, and to God manifested in Him, and not done at the bidding of the animal nature, or of any of the other strong temptations and impulses which hurry men into gross and coarse forms of manifest transgression, you get sin in its essence. Belief in Christ is the surrender of myself. Sin is living to myself rather than to God. And there you touch the bottom. All those different kinds of sin, however unlike they may be to one another—the lust of the sensualist, the craft of the cheat, the lie of the deceitful, the passion of the unregulated man, the avarice of the miser—all of them have this one common root, a diseased and bloated regard to self. The definition of sin is, living to

myself and making myself my own centre. The definition of faith is, making Christ my centre and living for Him. Therefore, if you want to know what is the sinfulness of sin, there it is. And, if I may use such a word in such a connection, it is all packed away in its *purest* form in the act of rejecting that Lord.

Brother, it is no exaggeration to say that, when you have summoned up before you the ugliest forms of man's sin that you can fancy, this one overtops them all, because it presents in the simplest form the mother-tincture of all sins, which, variously coloured and perfumed and combined, makes the evil of them all. A heap of rotting, poisonous matter is offensive to many senses, but the colourless, scentless, tasteless drop has the poison in its most virulent form, and is not a bit less virulent, though it has been learnedly distilled and christened with a scientific name, and put into a dainty jewelled flask. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." I lay that upon the hearts and consciences of some of my friends here to-night as the key to their rejection or disregard of Christ and His salvation.

II.—Now, secondly, notice the ascension of Jesus Christ as the pledge and the channel of the world's righteousness. "Because I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more."

He speaks as if the process of departure were already commenced. It had three stages—death, resurrection, ascension; but these three are all parts of the one departure. And so He says: "Because, in the future, when you go forth to preach in My Name,

I shall be there with the Father, having finished the work for which He sent Me; therefore you will convince the world of righteousness."

Now let me put that briefly in two forms. First of all, the fact of an ascended Christ is the guarantee and proof of His own complete fulfilment of the ideal of a righteous man. Or, to put it into simpler words, suppose Jesus Christ is dead; suppose that He never rose from the grave; suppose His bones mouldered in some sepulchre; suppose there was no ascension—would it be possible to believe that He was other than an ordinary man? And would it be possible to believe that, however beautiful these familiar records of His life, and however lovely the character which they reveal, there was really in Him no sin at all? A dead Christ means a Christ who, like the rest of us, had His limitations and His faults. But, on the other hand, if it be true that He sprang from the grave because "it was not possible that He should be holden of it," and because in His nature there was no proclivity to death, since there had been no indulgence in sin; and if it be true that He ascended up on high because that was His native sphere, and He rose to it as naturally as the water in the valley will rise to the height of the hill from which it has descended, then we can see that God has set His seal upon that life by that resurrection and ascension; and, as we gaze on Him swept up heavenward by His own calm power, a light falls backward upon all His earthly life, upon His claims to purity, and to union with the Father, and we say, "Surely this was a perfectly righteous man."

And, further, let me remind you that with this

supernatural fact of our Lord's resurrection and ascension stands or falls the possibility of His communicating any of His righteousness to us sinful men. If there be no such possibility, what does Jesus Christ's beauty of character matter to me? Nothing. I shall have to stumble on as best I can, sometimes ashamed and rebuked, sometimes stimulated and sometimes reduced to despair, by looking at the record of His life. If He be lying dead in a forgotten grave, and hath not ascended up on high, then there can come from His history and past nothing other in kind, though, perhaps, a little more in degree, than comes from the history and the past of the beautiful and white souls that have sometimes lived in the world. He is a saint like them, He is a teacher like them, He is a prophet like some of them, and we have but to try our best to copy that marble purity and white righteousness. But if He hath ascended up on high, and sits there, wielding the forces of the universe, as we believe He does, then to Him belongs the Divine prerogative of imparting His nature and His character to them that love Him. Then His righteousness is not a solitary, uncommunicative perfectness for Himself, but like a sun in the heavens, which streams out vivifying and enlightening rays to all that seek His face. If it be true that Christ has risen, then it is also true that you and I, convicted of sin, and learning our weakness and our faults, may come to Him, and, by the exercise of that simple and yet omnipotent act of faith, may ally our incompleteness with His perfectness, our sin with His righteousness, our emptiness with His fulness, and may have all the grace and the beauty of Jesus Christ passing

over into us to be the spirit of life in us, making us free from the law of sin and death. If Christ be risen, His righteousness may be the world's; if Christ be not risen, His righteousness is useless to any but to Himself.

My brother! wed yourself to that dear Lord by faith in Him, and His righteousness will become yours, and you will be found in Him without spot and blameless, clothed with white raiment like His own, and sharing in the Throne which belongs to the righteous Christ.

III.—Lastly, notice the judgment of the world's prince as the prophecy of the judgment of the world.

We are here upon ground which is only made known to us by the revelation of Scripture. We began with a fact of man's experience, we passed on to a fact of history; now we have a fact certified to us only on Christ's authority.

The world *has* a prince. That ill-omened and chaotic agglomeration of diverse forms of evil has yet a kind of anarchic order in it, and, like the fabled serpent's locks on the Gorgon head, they intertwine and sting one another, and yet they are a unity. We hear very little about the prince of the world in Scripture. Mercifully the existence of such a being is not plainly revealed until the fact of Christ's victory over him is revealed. But however ludicrous mediæval and vulgar superstitions may have made the notion, and however incredible the tremendous figure painted by the great Puritan poet has proved to be, there is nothing ridiculous, and nothing that we have the right to say is incredible, in the plain declarations that came from Christ's lips over and

over again, that the world, the aggregate of ungodly men, *has* a prince.

And then my text tells us that that prince is judged. The Cross did that, as Jesus Christ over and over again indicates, sometimes in plain words as "Now is the judgment of this world," "Now is the prince of this world cast out ;" sometimes in metaphor as "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," "First bind the strong man and then spoil his house." We do not know how far-reaching the influences of the Cross may be, and what they may have done in those dark regions, but we know that since that Cross, the power of evil in the world has been broken in its centre, that God has been disclosed, that new forces have been lodged in the heart of humanity, which only need to be developed in order to overcome the evil. We know that since that auspicious day when "He spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly and leading them in triumph," even when He was nailed upon the cross, the history of the world has been the judgment of the world. Hoary iniquities have toppled into the ceaseless washing sea of Divine love which has struck against their bases. Ancient evils have vanished, and more are on the point of vanishing. A loftier morality, a higher notion of righteousness, a deeper conception of sin, new hopes for the world and for men, have dawned upon mankind ; and the prince of the world is led bound, as it were, at the victorious chariot wheels. The central fortress has been captured, and the rest is an affair of outposts.

My text has for its last word this—the prince's judgment prophesies the world's future judgment

ment. The process which began when Jesus Christ died has for its consummation the Divine condemnation of all the evil that still afflicts humanity, and its deprivation of authority and power to injure. A final judgment will come, and that it will is manifested by the fact that Christ, when He came in the form of a servant and died upon the cross, judged the Prince. When He comes in the form of a King on the great White Throne He will judge the world which He has delivered from its Prince.

That thought, my brother, ought to be a hope to us all. Are you glad when you think that there is a day of judgment coming? Does your heart leap up when you realize the fact that the righteousness, which is in the heavens, is sure to conquer and coerce and clap under the hatches the sin that is riding rampant through the world? It was a joy and a hope to men who did not know half as much of the Divine love and the Divine righteousness as we do. They called upon the rocks and the hills to rejoice, and the trees of the forest to clap their hands before the Lord, "for He cometh to judge the world." Does your heart throb a glad Amen to that?

It ought to be a hope; it is a fear; and there are some of us who do not like to have the conviction driven home to us, that the end of the strife between sin and righteousness is that Jesus Christ shall judge the world, and take unto Himself His eternal kingdom.

But, my friends, hope or fear, it is a fact, as certain in the future, as the Cross is sure in the past, or the Throne in the present. Let me ask you this question, the question which Christ has sent all His

servants to ask—Have you learned your sin? have you opened your heart to Christ's righteousness? If we have, when men's hearts are failing them for fear, and they call on the rocks and the hills to cover them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne, we shall "have a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept," and lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment."



XXVII.

The Guide into all Truth.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine; therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.”—JOHN xvi. 12—15.



HIS is our Lord's last expansion, in these discourses, of the great promise of the Comforter which has appeared so often in them. First, He was spoken of simply as dwelling in Christ's servants, without any more special designation of His work than was involved in the name. Then, His aid was promised, to remind the Apostles of the facts of Christ's life, especially of His words; and so the inspiration and authority of the four Gospels were certified for us. Then He was further promised as the witness in the disciples to Jesus Christ. And, finally, in the immediately preceding context, we have His office of convincing, or convicting, the world of sin, and of

righteousness, and of judgment. And now we come to that gracious and gentle work which that Divine Spirit is declared by Christ to do, not only for that little group gathered round Him then, but for all those who trust themselves to His guidance. He is to be the "Spirit of Truth" to all the ages, who in simple verity will help true hearts to know and love the truth. There are three things in the words before us—first, the avowed incompleteness of Christ's own teaching; second, the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit of Truth guides; and, last, the unity of these two.

I.—First, then, we have here the avowed incompleteness of Christ's own teaching. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Now, in an earlier portion of these great discourses, we have our Lord asserting that *all* things whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had made known unto His servants. How do these two representations harmonize? Is it possible to make them agree? Surely, yes. There is a difference between the germ and the unfolded flower. There is a difference between principles and the complete development of these. I suppose you may say that all Euclid is in the axioms and definitions. I suppose you may also say that when you have learned the axioms and definitions, there are many things yet to be said, of which you have not grown to the apprehension. And so our Lord, as far as confidence was concerned, and as far as the fundamental and seminal principles of all religious truth were concerned, had even then declared all that He

had heard of the Father. But yet, in so far as the unfolding of these was concerned, the tracing of their consequences, the exhibition of their harmonies, the weaving of them into an ordered whole in which a man's understanding could lodge, there were many things yet to be said, which that handful of men were not able to bear. And so our Lord Himself here declares that His words spoken on earth are not His completed revelation.

Of course we find in them, as I believe, hints profound and pregnant, which only need to be unfolded and smoothed out, as it were, and their depths fathomed, in order to lead to all that is worthy of being called Christian truth. But upon many points we cannot but contrast the desultory, brief, obscure references which came from the Master's lips with the more systematized, full, and accurate teaching which came from the servants. The great crucial instance of all is the comparative reticence which our Lord observed in reference to His sacrificial death, and the atoning character of His sufferings for the world. I do not admit that the silence of the Gospels upon that subject is fairly represented when it is said to be absolute. I believe that that silence has been exaggerated by those who have no desire to accept that teaching. But the distinction is plain and obvious, not to be ignored, rather to be marked as being fruitful of blessed teaching, between the way in which Christ speaks about His Cross, and the way in which the Apostles speak about it after Pentecost.

What then? My text gives us the reason. "You

cannot bear them now." Now the word rendered "bear" here does not mean "bear" in the sense of endure, or tolerate, or suffer, but "bear" in the sense of carry. And the metaphor is that of some weight—it may be gold, but still it is a weight—laid upon a man whose muscles are not strong enough to sustain it. It crushes rather than gladdens. So because they had not strength enough to carry, had not capacity to receive, our Lord was lovingly reticent.

There is a great principle involved in this saying, that revelation is measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of the men who receive it. The light is graduated for the diseased eye. A wise physician does not flood that eye with full sunshine, but he puts on veils and bandages, and closes the shutters, and lets a stray beam, ever growing as the cure is perfected, fall upon it. So, from the beginning until the end of the process of revelation, there was a correspondence between men's capacity to receive the light and the light that was granted; and the faithful use of the less made them capable of receiving the greater, and as soon as they were capable of receiving, it came. "To him that hath shall be given." In His love, then, Christ did not load these men with principles that they could not carry, nor feed them with strong meat instead of milk, until they were able to bear it. Revelation is progressive, and Christ is reticent, from regard to the feebleness of His listeners.

Now that same principle is true in a modified form about us. How many things there are which we sometimes feel we should like to know, that God has not told us, because we have not yet grown up to the

point at which we could apprehend them ! Compassed with these veils of flesh and weakness, groping amidst the shadows of time, bewildered by the cross-lights that fall upon us from so many surrounding objects, we have not yet eyes able to behold the ineffable glory. He has many things to say to us about that blessed future, and that strange and awful life into which we are to step when we leave this poor world. But "ye cannot bear them now." Let us wait with patience until we are ready for the illumination. For two things go to make revelation, the light that reveals and the eye that beholds.

Now, one remark before I go further. People tell us, "Your modern theology is not in the Gospels." And they say to us, as if they had administered a knock-down blow, "We stick by Jesus, not Paul." Well, as I said, I do not admit that there is no "Pauline" teaching in the Gospels, but I do confess there is not much. And I say, "What then ?" Why, this, then—it is exactly what we were to expect ; and people who reject the Apostolic form of Christian teaching because it is not found in the Gospels are flying in the face of Christ's own teaching. You say you will take His words as the only source of religious truth. You are going clean contrary to His own words in saying so. Remember that He proclaimed their incompleteness, and referred us, for the fuller knowledge of the truth of God, to a subsequent Teacher.

II.—So, secondly, mark here the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit guides.

I must trouble you with just a word or two of remark as to the language of our text. Note the

personality, designation, and office of this new Teacher. "He," not *it*, He, is the Spirit of Truth whose characteristic and weapon is truth. "He will guide you"—suggesting a loving hand put out to lead; suggesting the graciousness, the gentleness, the gradualness of the teaching. "Into all truth"—that is no promise of omniscience, but it is the assurance of gradual and growing acquaintance with the spiritual and moral truth which is revealed, such as may be fitly paralleled by the metaphor of men passing into some broad land, of which there is much still to be possessed and explored. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, will all the truth belong to those whom the Spirit guides; but if they are true to His guidance, "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant," and the land will all be traversed at the last. "He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak." Mark the parallel between the relation of the Spirit-teacher to Jesus and the relation of Jesus to the Father. Of Him, too, it is said by Himself, "All things whatsoever I have heard of the Father I have declared unto you." The mark of Satan is, "He speaketh of His own"; the mark of the Divine Teacher is, "He speaketh not of Himself, but whatsoever things," in all their variety, in their continuity, in their completeness, "He shall hear." Where? Yonder in the depths of the Godhead—"whatsoever things He shall hear," there He shall show to you. And especially, "He will show you the things that are to come." These Apostles were living in a revolutionary time. Men's hearts were failing them for fear of the things that were coming on the earth. Step by step

they would be taught the evolving glory of that kingdom which they were to be the instruments in founding; and step by step there would be spread out before them the vision of the future and all the wonder that should be, the world that was to come, the new constitution which Christ was to establish.

Now, if that be the interpretation, however inadequately, of these great and wonderful words, there are but two things needful to say about them. One is that this promise of a complete guidance into truth applies in a peculiar and unique fashion to the original hearers of it. I ventured to say that one of the other promises of the Spirit, which I quoted in my introductory remarks, was the certificate to us of the inspiration and reliableness of these four Gospels. And I now remark that in these words, in their plain and unmistakable meaning, there lie involved the inspiration and authority of the Apostles as teachers of religious truth. Here we have the guarantee for the authority over our faith, of the words which came from these men, and from the other who was added to their number on the Damascus road. They were guided "*into all the truth*," and so our task is to receive the truth into which they were guided.

The Acts of the Apostles is the best commentary on these words of my text. There you see how these men rose at once into a new region; how the things about their Master which had been bewildering puzzles to them flashed into light; how the Cross, which had baffled and dispersed them, became at once the centre of union for themselves and for the world; how the obscure became lucid, and Christ's Death and the Re-

surrection stood forth to them as the great central facts of the world's salvation. In the book of the Apocalypse we have part of the fulfilment of this closing promise: "He will show you things to come"; when the Seer was "in the Spirit" on the Lord's-day, and the heavens were opened, and the history of the Church (whether in chronological order, or in the exhibition of symbols of the great forces which shall be arrayed for and against it, over and over again, to the end of time, does not at present matter) was spread before Him as a scroll.

Now, dear friends, this great principle of my text has a modified application also to us all. For that Divine Spirit is given to each of us if we will use it, is given to any and every man who desires it, does dwell in Christian hearts, though, alas! so many of us are so little conscious of it, and does teach us the truth which Christ Himself left incomplete.

Only let me make one remark here. We do not stand on the same level as these men who clustered round Christ on His road to Gethsemane, and received the first fruits of the promise—the Spirit. They, taught by that Divine Guide and by experience, were led into the deeper apprehension of the words and the deeds, of the life and the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. We, taught by that same Spirit, are led into a deeper apprehension of the words which they spake, both in recording and interpreting the facts of Christ's life and death.

And so we come sharp up to this, "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I speak unto him are the commandments of the Lord." That is how an

apostle put his relation to the other possessors of the Divine Spirit. And you and I have to take this as the criterion of all true possession of the Spirit of God, that it bows in humble submission to the authoritative teaching of this book.

III.—Lastly, we have here our Lord pointing out the unity of these two.

In the verse on which I have just been commenting He says nothing about Himself, and it might easily appear to the listeners as if these two sources of truth, His own incomplete teaching, and the full teaching of the Divine Spirit, were independent of, if not opposed to, one another. So in the last words of our text He shows us the blending of the two streams, the union of the two beams.

“He shall glorify Me.” Think of a *man* saying that! The Spirit who will come from God and guide men into all truth has for His distinctive office the glorifying of Jesus Christ. So fair is He, so good, so radiant, that to make Him known *is* to glorify Him. The glorifying of Christ is the ultimate and adequate purpose of everything that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done, because the glorifying of Christ is the glorifying of God, and the blessing of the eyes that behold His glory.

“For He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you.” All that that Divine Spirit brings is Christ’s. So, then, there is no new revelation, only the interpretation of the revelation. The text is given; and its last word was spoken, when the cloud received Him out of their sight, and henceforward all is commentary. The Spirit takes of Christ’s; applies the principles, unfolds the deep meaning of

words and deeds, and especially the meaning of the mystery of the Cradle, and the tragedy of the Cross, and the mystery of the Ascension, as declaring that Christ is the Son of God, the Sacrifice for the world. Christ said, "I am the Truth." Therefore, when He promises, "He shall guide you into all the truth," we may fairly conclude that the "truth" into which the Spirit guides is the personal Christ. It is the whole Christ, the whole truth, that we are to receive from that Divine teacher; growing up day by day into the capacity to grasp Christ more firmly, to understand Him better, and by love and trust and obedience to make Him more entirely our own. We are like the first settlers upon some great island-continent. There is a little fringe of population round the coast, but away in the interior are leagues of virgin forests and fertile plains stretching to the horizon, and snow-capped summits piercing the clouds, on which no foot has ever trod. "He shall guide you into all truth;" through the length and breadth of the boundless land, the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"All things that the Father hath are Mine, therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and show it unto you." What awful words! A Divine teaching Spirit can only teach concerning God. Christ here explains the paradox of His words preceding, in which, if He were but human, He seems to have given that teaching Spirit an unworthy office by explaining that whatsoever is His is God's, and whatsoever is God's is His.

My brother! Do you believe that? Is that what you think about Jesus Christ? He puts out here

an unpresumptuous hand, and grasps all the constellated glories of the Divine nature, and says, "They are Mine;" and the Father looks down from heaven and says, "Son, Thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is Thine." Do you answer, "Amen! I believe it"?

Here are three lessons from these great words which I leave with you without attempting to unfold them. One is, Believe a great deal more definitely in, and seek a great deal more consciously and earnestly, and use a great deal more diligently and honestly, that Divine Spirit who is given to us all. I fear me that over very large tracts of professing Christendom to-day, men only stand up with very faltering lips and confess, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Hence comes much of the weakness of our modern Christianity, the worldliness of professing Christians, "and when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." "Quench not, grieve not, despise not the Holy Spirit."

Another lesson is, Use the Book that He uses—else you will not grow, and He will have no means of contact with you.

And the last is, Try the spirits. If anything calling itself Christian teaching comes to you and does not glorify Christ, it is self-condemned. For none can exalt Him highly enough, and no teaching can present Him too exclusively and urgently as the sole Salvation and Life of the whole earth. And if it be, as my text tells us, that the great teaching Spirit is to come, who is to "guide us into all truth," and therein

is to glorify Christ, and to show us the things that are His, then it is also true, "hereby know we the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is that spirit of antichrist."



XXVIII.

“What is this that He saith?”

“A little while, and ye shall not see Me : and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me : because I go to the Father. Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me : and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me : and, because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me : and again, A little while, and ye shall see Me?”—JOHN xvi. 16—19.



SUPERFICIAL glance at the former part of these verses may fail to detect their connection with the great preceding promise of the Spirit who is to guide the disciples “into all truth.”

They appear to stand quite isolated and apart from that. But a little thought will bring out an obvious connection. The first words of our text are really the climax and crown of the promise of the Spirit ; for that Spirit is to “guide into all the truth” by declaring to the disciples the things that are Christ’s, and in consequence of that ministration, they are to be able to see their unseen Lord. So this

is the loftiest thought of what the Divine Spirit does for the Christian heart, that it shows him a visible though absent Christ.

Then we have in the subsequent part of our text the blundering of the bewildered disciples and the patient answer of the long-suffering Teacher. So that there are these three points to take up: the times of disappearance and of sight; the bewildered disciples; and the patient Teacher.

I.—First of all, then, note the deep teaching of our Lord here, about the times of disappearance and of sight.

The words are plain enough; the difficulty lies in the determination of the periods to which they refer. He tells us that, after a brief interval from the time at which He was speaking, there should come a short parenthesis during which He was not to be seen; and that upon that would follow a period of which no end is hinted at, during which He is to be seen. The two words employed in the two consecutive clauses, for "sight," are not the same, and so they naturally suggest some difference in the manner of vision.

But the question arises, Where are the limits of these times of which the Lord speaks? Now it is quite clear, I suppose, that the first of the "little whiles" is the few hours that intervened between His speaking and the Cross. And it is equally clear that His death and burial began, at all events, the period during which they were not to see Him. But where does the second period begin, during which they are to see Him? Is it at His Resurrection or at His Ascension, when the process of going "to the Father" was completed in all its stages; or at Pentecost, when

the Spirit, by whose ministration He was to be made visible, was poured out? The answer is, perhaps, not to be restricted to any one of these periods; but I think if we consider that all disciples, in all ages, have a portion in all the rest of these great discourses, and if we note the absence of any hint that the promised seeing of Christ was ever to terminate, and if we mark the diversity of words under which the two manners of vision are described, and, above all, if we note the close connection of these words with those which precede, we shall come to the conclusion that the full realization of this great promise of a visible Christ did not begin until that time when the Spirit, poured out, opened the eyes of His servants, and they saw His glory. But, however we settle the minor question of the chronology of these periods, the great truth shines out here is that, through all the stretch of the ages, true hearts may truly see the true Christ.

If we might venture to suppose that in our text the second of the periods to which He refers, when they did not see Him, was not contemporaneous with, but preceded, the second "little while," all would be clear. Then the first "little while" would be the few hours before the Cross. "Ye shall not see Me" would refer to the days in which He lay in the tomb. "Again a little while" would point to that strange transitional period between His death and His ascension, in which the disciples had neither the close intercourse of earlier days nor the spiritual communion of later ones. And the final period, "Ye shall see Me," would cover the whole course of the centuries till He comes again.

However that may be, and I only offer it as a

possible suggestion, the thing that we want to fasten upon for ourselves is this—we all, if we will, may have a vision of Christ as close, as real, as firmly certifying us of His reality, and making as vivid an impression upon us, as if He stood there, visible to our senses. And so “by this vision splendid” we may “be everywhere attended,” and whithersoever we go, have burning before us the light of His countenance, in the sunshine of which we shall walk.

Brother! that is personal Christianity—to see Jesus Christ, and to live with the thrilling consciousness, printed deep and abiding upon our spirits, that, in very deed, He is by our sides. Oh! how that conviction would make life strong and calm and noble and blessed! How it would lift us up above temptation! “He endured as seeing Him who is Invisible.” What should terrify us if Christ stood before us? What should charm us if we saw Him? Competing glories and attractions would fade before His presence, as a dim candle dies at noon. It would make all life full of a blessed companionship. Who could be solitary if he saw Christ; or feel that life was dreary if that Friend was by his side? It would fill our hearts with joy and strength, and make us evermore blessed with the light of His countenance.

And how are we to get it? Remember the connection of my text. It is because there is a Divine Spirit to show men the things that are Christ’s, that therefore, unseen, He is visible to the eye of faith. And therefore the shortest and directest road to the vision of Jesus is the submitting of heart and mind and spirit to the teaching of that Divine Spirit,

who uses the record of the Scriptures as the means by which He makes Jesus Christ known to us.

But besides this waiting upon that Divine Teacher, let me remind you that there are conditions of discipline which must be fulfilled upon our parts, if any clear vision of Jesus Christ is to bless us pilgrims in this lonely world. And the first of these conditions is—If you want to see Jesus Christ, think about Him. Occupy your minds with Him. If men in the city walk the pavements with their eyes fixed upon the gutters, what does it matter though all the glories of a sunset are dyeing the western sky? They will see none of them; and if Christ stood beside you, closer to you than any other, if your eyes were fixed upon the trivialities of this poor present, you would see not Him. If you want to see Christ honestly, meditate upon Him.

And if you want to see Him, shut out competing objects, and the dazzling cross-lights that come in and hide Him from us. There must be a "looking *off* unto Jesus." There must be a rigid limitation, if not excision of other objects, if we are to grasp Him. If we would see, and have our hearts filled with, the calm sublimity of the solemn, white wedge that lifts itself into the far-off blue, we must not let our gaze stop on the busy life of the valleys or the green slopes of the lower Alps, but must lift it and keep it fixed aloft. Meditate upon Him, and shut out other things.

If you want to see Christ, do His will. One act of obedience has more power to clear a man's eyes than hours of idle contemplation; and one act of disobedience has more power to dim his eyes than

anything besides. It is in the dusty common road that He draws near to us, and the experience of those disciples that journeyed to Emmaus may be ours. He meets us in the way, and makes our hearts burn within us. The experience of the dying martyr outside the city gate may be ours. Sorrows and trials will rend the heavens if they be rightly borne, and so we shall see Christ standing at the right hand of God. Rebellious tears blind our eyes, as Mary's did, so that she did not know the Master and took Him for the gardener. Submissive tears purge the eyes and wash them clean to see His face. To do His will is the sovereign method for beholding His countenance.

Brethren! is this our experience? You professing Christians, do you see Christ? Are your eyes fixed upon Him? Do you go through life with Him consciously nearer to you than any beside? Is He closer than the intrusive insignificancies of this fleeting present? Have you Him as your continual Companion? Oh! when we contrast the difference between the largeness of this promise—a promise of a thrilling consciousness of His presence, of a vivid perception of His character, of an unwavering certitude of His reality—and the fly-away glimpses and wandering sight, and faint, far-off views, as of a planet weltering amid clouds, which the most of Christian men have of Christ, what shame should cover our faces, and how we should feel that, if we have not the fulfilment, it is our own fault! Blessed they of whom it is true that they see “no man any more save Jesus only”; and to whom all sorrow, joy, care, anxiety, work, and repose are but the means of revealing that

sweet and all-sufficient presence! "I have set the Lord always before me, therefore I shall not be moved."

II.—Now notice, secondly, these bewildered disciples.

We find, in the early portion of these discourses, that twice they ventured to interrupt our Lord with more or less relevant questions, but as the wonderful words flowed on, they seem to have been awed into silence; and our Lord Himself almost complains of them that "None of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?" The inexhaustible truths that He had spoken seem to have gone clear over their heads, but the verbal repetition of the "little whiles," and the recurring ring of the sentences seem to have struck upon their ears. So, passing by all the great words, they fasten upon this minor thing, and whisper among themselves, perhaps lagging behind on the road, as to what He means by these "little whiles." The Revised Version is probably correct, or, at least, it has strong manuscript authority in its favour, in omitting the clause in our Lord's words, "Because I go to the Father." The disciples seem to have quoted, not from the preceding verse, but from a verse a little before that in the context, where He said that "the Spirit will convince the world of righteousness because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." The contradiction seems to strike them.

These disciples in their bewilderment seem to me to represent some very common faults which we all commit in our dealing with the Lord's words, and to one or two of these I turn for a moment.

Note this, to begin with, how they pass by the

greatest truths in order to fasten upon a smaller outstanding difficulty. They have no questions to ask about the gifts of the Spirit, nor about the unity of Christ and His disciples as represented in the Vine and the branches, nor about what He tells them of the love that lays down its life for its friends. But when He comes into the region of chronology, they are all agog to know the "when" about which He is so enigmatically speaking.

Now is not that exactly like us, and does not the Christianity of this day very much want the hint to pay most attention to the greatest truths, and let the little difficulties fall into their subordinate place? The central truths of Christianity are the Incarnation and Atonement of Jesus Christ. And yet outside questions, altogether subordinate and, in comparison with this, unimportant, are filling the attention and the thoughts of people at present to such an extent that there is great danger of the central truth of all being either passed by, or the reception of it being suspended on the clearing up of smaller questions.

The truth that Christ is the Son of God, Who has died for our salvation, is the heart of the Gospel. And why should we make our faith in that, and our living by it, contingent on the clearing up of certain external and secondary questions; chronological, historical, critical, philological, scientific, and the like? And why should men be so occupied in jangling about the latter as that the towering supremacy, the absolute independence, of the former should be lost sight of? What would you think of a man in a fire who, when they brought the fire-escape to him, said, "I decline to trust myself to it, until you first of all explain to

me the principles of its construction; and, secondly, tell me all about who made it; and, thirdly, inform me where all the materials of which it is made came from"? But that is very much what a number of people are doing to-day in reference to the Gospel of our salvation, when they demand that the small questions—on which the central verity does not at all depend—shall be answered and settled before they cast themselves upon that.

Another of the blunders of these disciples, in which they show themselves as our brethren, is that they fling up the attempt to apprehend the obscurity in a very swift despair. "We cannot tell what He saith, and we are not going to try any more. It is all cloudland and chaos together."

Intellectual indolence, spiritual carelessness deal so with outstanding difficulties, abandoning precipitately the attempt to grasp them or that which lies behind them. And yet, although there are no gratuitous obscurities in Christ's teaching, He said a great many things which could not possibly be understood at the time, in order that the disciples might stretch up towards what was above them, and, by stretching up, might grow. I do not think it is a good thing to break down the children's bread too small. A wise teacher will now and then blend with the utmost simplicity something that is just a little in advance of the capacity of the listener, and so encourage a little hand to stretch itself out, and the arm to grow because it is stretched. If there are no difficulties there is no effort, and if there is no effort there is no growth. Difficulties are there in order that we may grapple with them, and truth is sometimes hidden in a well in order that

we may have the blessing of the search, and that the truth found after the search may be more precious. The tropics with their easy, luxuriant growth, where the footfall turns up the warm soil, grow languid men, and our less smiling latitude grows strenuous ones. Thank God that everything is not easy, even in that which is meant for the revelation of all truth to all men. Instead of turning tail at the first fence, let us learn that it will do us good to climb, and that the fence is there in order to draw forth our effort.

There is another point in which these bewildered disciples are uncommonly like the rest of us; and that is, that they have no patience to wait for time and growth to solve the difficulty. They want to know all about it now, or not at all. If they would wait for six weeks they would understand, as they did. Pentecost explained it all. We, too, are often in a hurry. There is nothing that the ordinary mind, and often the educated mind, detests so much as uncertainty, and being consciously baffled by some outstanding difficulty. And in order to escape that uneasiness, men are dogmatical when they should be doubtful, and positively asserting, when it would be a great deal more for the health of their souls and of their listeners to say, "Well, really I do not know, and I am content to wait." So, on both sides of great controversies, you get men who will not be content to let things stand, for all must be made clear and plain to-day.

Ah! brethren, for ourselves, for our own intellectual difficulties, and for the difficulties of the world, there is nothing like time and patience. The mysteries that used to plague us when we were boys melted

away when we grew up. And many questions which trouble me to-day, and through which I cannot find my way, if I lay them aside, and go about my ordinary duties, and come back to them to-morrow with a fresh eye and an unwearied brain, will have straightened themselves out and become clear. We grow into our best and deepest convictions, we are not dragged into them by any force of logic. So for our own sorrows, questions, pains, griefs, and for all the riddle of this painful world

"Take it on trust a little while,
Thou soon shall read the mystery right
In the full sunshine of His smile."

III.—Lastly, and very briefly, a word about the patient Teacher.

"Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him." He knows all our difficulties and perplexities. Perhaps it is His supernatural knowledge that is indicated in the words before us, or perhaps it is merely that He saw them whispering amongst themselves and so inferred their wish. Be that as it may, we may take the comfort that we have to do with a Teacher who accurately understands how much we understand and where we grope, and will shape His teaching according to our necessities.

He had not a word of rebuke for the slowness of their apprehension. He might well have said to them, "Oh! fools, and slow of heart to believe." But that word was not addressed to them then, though two of them deserved it and got it, after events had brought light to His teaching. He never rebukes us either for our stupidity or for our carelessness, but has long patience with us.

He does give them a kind of rebuke. "Do ye inquire *among yourselves?*" That is a hopeful source to go to for knowledge. Why did they not ask Him instead of whispering and muttering there behind Him, as if two people equally ignorant could help each other to knowledge? Inquiry "among yourselves" is folly; to ask Him is wisdom. We can do much for one another, but the deepest riddles and mysteries can only be wisely dealt with in one way. Take them to Him, tell Him about them. Told to Him they often dwindle. They become smaller when they are looked at beside Him, and He will help us to understand as much as may be understood, and patiently to wait and leave the residue unsolved, until the time shall come when we shall know even as we are known.

In the context here, Jesus Christ does not explain to the disciples the precise point that troubled them. Olivet and Pentecost were to do that; but He gives them what will tide them over the time until the explanation shall come, in triumphant hopes of a joy and peace that is drawing near.

And so, there is a great deal in all our lives, in His dealings with us, in His revelation of Himself to us, that must remain mysterious and unintelligible. But if we will keep close to Him, and speak plainly to Him in prayer and communion about our difficulties, He will send us triumphant hope and large confidence of a coming joy, that will float us over the bar and make us feel that the burden is no longer painful to carry. Much that must remain dark through life will be lightened when we get yonder; for the vision here is not perfect, and the knowledge here is as imperfect as the vision.

Dear friends, the one question for us all is, Do our eyes fix and fasten on that dear Lord, and is it the description of our whole lives, that we see Him and walk with Him? Oh! if so, then life will be blessed, and death itself will be but as "a little while," when we "shall not see Him," and then we shall open our eyes and behold Him close at hand, whom we saw from afar, and with wandering eyes, amidst the mists and illusions of earth. To see Him as He has become for our sakes is heaven on earth. To see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven; and before that Face, as the sun shining in His strength, all sorrows, difficulties and mysteries will melt as morning mists.



XXIX.

Sorrow turned into Joy.*

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice : and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come : but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow : but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”—JOHN xvi. 20—22.



THESE words, to which we have come in the ordinary course of our exposition, make an appropriate text for Easter Sunday. For their one theme is the joy which began upon that day, and was continued in increasing measure as the possession of Christ's servants after Pentecost. Our Lord promises that the momentary sadness and pain shall be turned into a swift and continual joy. He pledges His word for that, and bids us believe it on His bare word. He illustrates it by that tender and beautiful image which, in the pains and bliss of motherhood, finds an analogy for the pains and bliss of the disciples, inasmuch as, in both cases, pain leads

* Preached on Easter Sunday.

directly to blessedness in which it is forgotten. And He crowns His great promises by explaining to us what is the deepest foundation of our truest gladness, "I will see you again," and by declaring that such a joy is independent of all foes and all externals, "and your joy no man taketh from you."

There are, then, two or three aspects of the Christian life as a glad life which are set before us in these words, and to which I ask your attention.

I.—There is, first, the promise of a joy which is a transformed sorrow.

"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy," not merely that the one emotion is substituted for the other, but that the one emotion, as it were, becomes the other. This can only mean that that, which was the cause of the one, reverses its action and becomes the cause of the opposite. Of course the historical and immediate fulfilment of these words lies in the double result of Christ's Cross upon His servants. For part of three dreary days it was the occasion of their sorrow, their panic, their despair; and then, all at once, when with a bound the mighty fact of the Resurrection dawned upon them, that which had been the occasion for their deep grief, for their apparently hopeless despair, suddenly became the occasion for a rapture beyond their dreams, and a joy which would never pass. The Cross of Christ, which for some few hours was pain, and all but ruin, has ever since been the centre of the deepest gladness and confidence of a thousand generations.

I do not need to remind you, I suppose, of the value, as a piece of evidence of the historical veracity of the Gospel story, of this sudden change and

complete revolution in the sentiments and emotions of that handful of believers. What was it that lifted them out of the pit? What was it that revolutionized in a moment their notions of the Cross and of its bearing upon them? What was it that changed down-hearted, despondent, and all but apostate disciples, into heroes and martyrs? It was the one fact which Christendom commemorates to-day: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was the element, added to the dark potion, which changed it all in a moment into golden flashing light. The Resurrection was what made the death of Christ no longer the occasion for the dispersion of His disciples, but bound them to Him with a closer bond. And I venture to say that, unless the first disciples were lunatics, there is no explanation of the changes through which they passed in some eight-and-forty hours, except the supernatural and miraculous fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That set a light to the thick column of smoke, and made it blaze up a pillar of fire. That changed sorrow into joy. The same death which, before the Resurrection, drew a pall of darkness over the heavens, and draped the earth in mourning, by reason of that Resurrection which swept away the cloud and brought out the sunshine, became the source of joy. A dead Christ was the Church's despair; a dead and risen Christ is the Church's triumph, because He is "the Christ that died . . . and is alive for evermore."

But, more generally, let me remind you how this very same principle, which applies directly and historically to the Resurrection of our Lord, may be legitimately expanded so as to cover the whole

ground of devout men's sorrows and calamities. Sorrow is the first stage, of which the second and completed stage is transformation into joy. Every thundercloud has a rainbow lying in its depths when the sun smites upon it. Our purest and noblest joys are transformed sorrows. The sorrow of contrite hearts becomes the gladness of pardoned children; the sorrow of bereaved empty hearts may become the gladness of hearts filled with God; and every grief that stoops upon our path may be, and will be, if we keep near that dear Lord, changed into its own opposite, and become the source of blessedness else unattainable. Every stroke of the bright, sharp ploughshare that goes through the fallow ground, and every dark winter's day of pulverizing frost and lashing tempest and howling wind, are represented in the broad acres, waving with the golden grain. All your griefs and mine, brother, if we carry them to the Master, will flash up into gladness and be turned into joy.

II.—Still further, another aspect here of the glad life of the true Christian is, that it is a joy founded upon the consciousness that Christ's eye is upon us.

"I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice." In other parts of these closing discourses the form of the promise is the converse of this, as for instance—"Yet a little while and *ye* shall see *Me*." Here Christ lays hold of the thought by the other handle, and says, "*I* will see *you* again, and your heart shall rejoice." Now these two forms of putting the same mutual relationship, of course, agree, in that they both of them suggest, as the true foundation of the blessedness which they promise, the fact of communion

with a present Lord. But they differ from one another in colouring, and in the emphasis which they place upon the two parts of that communion. "*Ye shall see Me*" fixes attention upon us and our perception of Him. "*I will see you*" fixes attention rather upon Him and His beholding of us. "*Ye shall see Me*" speaks of our going out after Him and being satisfied in Him. "*I will see you*" speaks of His perfect knowledge, of His loving care, of His tender, compassionate, complacent, ever-watchful eye resting upon us, in order that He may communicate to us all needful good.

And so it requires a loving heart on our part, in order to find joy in such a promise. His eyes are as a flame of fire, and He sees all men; but unless our hearts cleave to Him and we know ourselves to be knit to Him by the tender bond of love from Him, accepted and treasured in our souls, then "*I will see you again*" is a threat and not a promise. It depends upon the relation which we bear to Him, whether it is blessedness or misery to think that He whose flaming eye reads all men's sins and pierces through all hypocrisies and veils has it fixed upon us. The sevenfold utterance of His words to the Asiatic churches—the last recorded words of Jesus Christ—begins with "*I know thy works.*" It was no joy to the lukewarm professors at Laodicea, nor to the church at Ephesus which had lost the freshness of its early love, that the Master knew them; but to the faithful souls in Philadelphia, and to the few in Sardis, who "*had not defiled their garments,*" it was blessedness and life to feel that they walked in the sunshine of His face.

Is there any joy to us in the thought that the Lord Christ sees us? Oh, if our hearts are really His, if our lives are as truly built upon Him as our profession of being Christians alleges that they are, then all that we need for the satisfaction of our nature, for the supply of our various necessities, or as an armour against temptation, and an amulet against sorrow, will be given to us, in the belief that His eye is fixed upon us. There is the foundation of the truest joy for men. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time when their corn and their wine abound." One look *towards* Christ will more than repay and abolish earth's sorrow. One look *from* Christ will fill our hearts with sunshine. All tears are dried on eyes that meet His. Loving hearts find their heaven in looking into one another's faces, and if Christ be our love, our deepest and purest joys will be found in His glance and our answering gaze.

If one could take a bit of the Arctic world and float it down into the tropics anyhow, the ice would all melt, and the grey dreariness would disappear, and a new splendour of colour and of light would clothe the fields, and an unwonted vegetation would spring up where barrenness had been. And if you and I will only float our lives southward beneath the direct vertical rays of that great Sun of Righteousness, then all the dreary winter and ice of our sorrows will melt, and joy will spring. Brother, the Christian life is a glad life, because Christ, the Infinite and Incarnate lover of our

souls, looks upon the heart that loves and trusts Him.

III.—Still further, note how our Lord here sets forth His disciples' joy as beyond the reach of violence and independent of externals.

"No man taketh it from you." Of course, that refers primarily to the opposition and actual hostility of the persecuting world, which that handful of frightened men were very soon to face; and our Lord assures them here that, whatsoever the power of the Devil working through the world may be able to filch away from them, it cannot filch away the joy that He gives. But we may expand the meaning beyond that reference.

Much of our joy, of course, depends upon our fellows, and disappears when they fade away from our sight and we struggle along in a solitude, made the more dreary because of remembered companionship. And much of our joy depends upon the goodwill and help of our fellows, and they can snatch away all that so depends. They can hedge up our road and make it uncomfortable and sad for us in many ways, but no man but myself can put a roof over my head to shut me out from God and Christ; and as long as I have a clear sky over head, it matters very little how high may be the walls that foes or hostile circumstances pile around me, and how close they may press upon me. And much of our joy necessarily depends upon and fluctuates with external circumstances of a hundred different kinds, as we all only too well know. But we do not need to have all our joy fed from these surface springs. We may dig deeper down if we like. If we are Christians, we have, like some beleaguered garrison

in a fortress, a well in the courtyard that nobody can get at, and which never can run dry. "Your joy no man taketh from you."

As long as we have Christ, we cannot be desolate. If He and I were alone in the universe, or, paradoxical as it may sound, if He and I were alone, and the universe were not, I should have all that I needed and my joy would be full, if I loved Him as I ought to do.

So, my brother, let us see to it that we dig deep enough for the foundation of our blessedness, and that it is on Christ and nothing less infinite, less eternal, less unchangeable, that we repose for inward blessedness which nothing outside of us can touch. That is the blessedness which we may all possess, "for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us" from the eye and the heart of the risen Christ who lives for us.

But remember, though externals have no power to rob us of our joy, they have a very formidable power to interfere with the cultivation of that faith, which is the essential condition of our joy. They cannot force us away from Christ, but they may tempt us away. The sunshine did for the traveller in the old fable what the storm could not do; and the world may cause you to think so much about it that you forget your Master. Its joys may compel Him to hide His face, and may so fill your eyes that you do not care to look at His face; and so the sweet bond may be broken, and the consciousness of a living, loving Jesus may fade, and become filmy and unsub-

stantial, and occasional and interrupted. Do you see to it that what the world cannot do by violence and directly, it does not do by its harlot kisses and its false promises, tempting you away from the paths where alone you can meet your Master.

IV.—Lastly, note that this life of joy, which our Lord here speaks of, is made certain by the promise of a faithful Christ.

“Verily! verily! I say unto you.” He was accustomed to use that impressive and solemn formula, when He was about to speak words beyond the reach of human wisdom to discover, or of prime importance for men to accept and believe. He tells these men, who had nothing but His bare word to rely upon, that the astonishing thing which He is going to promise them will certainly come to pass. He would encourage them to rest an unfaltering confidence, for the brief parenthesis of sorrow, upon His faithful promise of joy. He puts His own character, so to speak, in pawn. His words are precisely equivalent in meaning to the solemn Old Testament words which are represented as being the oath of God, “As I live, saith the Lord.” “You may be as sure of this thing as you are of My Divine existence, for all My Divine Being is pledged to you to bring it about.”—“Verily! verily! I say unto you.” “You may be as sure of this thing as you are of Me, for all that I am is pledged to fulfil the words of My lips.”

So Christ puts His whole truthfulness at stake, as it were; and if any man that has ever loved Jesus Christ and trusted Him aright has not found this “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” then Jesus Christ has said the thing that is not.

Then why is it that so many professing Christians have such joyless lives as they have? Simply because they do not keep the conditions. If we will love Him so as to set our hearts upon Him, if we will desire Him as our chief good, if we will keep our eyes fixed upon Him, then, as sure as He is living and is the Truth, He will flood our hearts with blessedness, and His joy will pour into our souls as the flashing tide rushes into some muddy and melancholy harbour, and sets everything dancing that was lying stranded on the slime. If, my brother, you, a professing Christian, know but little of this joy, why, then, it is your fault, and not His. The joyless lives of so many who say they are His disciples cast no shadow of suspicion upon His veracity, but they do cast a very deep shadow of doubt upon their profession of faith in Him.

Is your religion joyful? Is your joy religious? The two questions go together. And if we cannot answer these questions in the light of God's eye as we ought to do, let these great promises of my text prick us into holier being, into more consistent Christian character, and a closer walk with our Master and Lord.

The out-and-out Christian is a joyful Christian. The half-and-half Christian is the kind of Christian that a great many of you are—little acquainted with the joy of the Lord. Why should we live half way up the hill, and swathed in mists, when we might have an unclouded sky and a visible sun over our heads, if we would only climb higher and walk in the light of His face?

What that Day will bring forth.

“And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name : ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”—JOHN xvi. 23, 24.



OUR Lord here sums up the prerogatives and privileges of His servants in the day that was about to dawn and to last till He came again. There is nothing absolutely new in the words; substantially the promises contained in them have appeared in former parts of these discourses under somewhat different aspects and connections. But our Lord brings them together here, in this condensed repetition, in order that the scattered rays, being thus focussed, may have more power to illuminate with certitude, and to warm into hope. “Ye shall ask Me nothing. . . . Ask and ye shall receive. . . . Your joy shall be full.” These are the jewels which He sets in a cluster, the juxtaposition making each brighter, and gives to us for a parting keepsake.

Now it is to be noticed that the two askings which

are spoken of here are expressed by different words in the Greek. Our English word "ask" means two things, either to question or to request; to ask in the sense of interrogating, in order to get information and teaching, or in the sense of beseeching, in order to get gifts. In the former sense the word is employed in the first clause of my text, with distinct reference to the disciples' desire to ask Him a very foolish question a moment or two before; and in the second sense it is employed in the central portion of my text.

So, then, there are three things here as the marks of the Christian life all through the ages: the cessation of the ignorant questions addressed to a present Christ; the satisfaction of desires; and the perfecting of joy. These are the characteristics of a true Christian life. My brother! are they in any degree the characteristics of yours?

I.—Note then, first, no more questionings.

"In that day ye shall ask Me nothing." And do not you think that when the disciples heard that they would be tempted to say, "Then what in all the world are we to do?" To them the thought that He was not going to be at their sides any longer, for them to go to with their difficulties, must have seemed despair rather than advance; but in Christ's eyes it was progress. He tells them and us that we gain by losing Him, and are better off than they were, precisely because He does not any longer stand at our sides for us to question. It is better for a boy to puzzle out the meaning of a Latin book by his own brains and the help of a lexicon than it is lazily to use an interlinear translation. And, though we do not always feel it,

and are often tempted to think how blessed it would be if we had an infallible Teacher visible here at our sides, it is a great deal better for us that we have not ; and it is a step in advance that He has gone away. Many eager and honest Christian souls, hungering after certainty and rest, have cast themselves in these latter days into the arms of an infallible Church. I doubt whether any such questioning mind has found what is sought ; and I am sure that it has taken a step downwards, and not upwards, from the spiritual guidance realized by our own honest industry and earnest use of the materials supplied to us in Christ's word, to any external authority which comes to us to save us the trouble of thinking, and to confirm to us truth, which we have not made our own by search and effort. We gain by losing the visible Christ ; and He was proclaiming progress and not retrogression, when He said : " In that day ye shall ask Me no more questions."

For what have we instead ? We have two things : a completed revelation, and an inward Teacher.

We have a completed revelation. Great and wonderful and unspeakably precious as were and are the words of Jesus Christ, His deeds are far more. The death of Christ has told us things that Christ before His death could not tell. The resurrection of Christ has cast light upon all the darkest places of man's destiny which Christ, before His resurrection, could not by any words so illuminate. The ascension of Christ has opened doors for thought, for faith, for hope, which were fast closed, notwithstanding all His teachings, until He had burst them asunder and passed to His throne. And the facts which are substituted

for the bodily presence of Jesus with His disciples tell us a great deal more than they could ever have drawn from Him by questionings, however persistent and however wisely directed. We have a completed revelation, and therefore we need ask Him nothing.

And we have a Divine Spirit that will come to us if we will, and teach us by means of blessing the exercise of our own faculties, and guiding us, not, indeed, into the uniform perception of the intellectual aspects of Christian truth, but into the apprehension and the loving possession, as a power in our lives, of all the truth that we need to mould our characters and to raise us to the likeness of Himself.

Only, brother, let us remember what such a method of teaching demands from us. It needs that we honestly use the revelation that is given us; it needs that we loyally, lovingly, trustfully, submit ourselves to the teaching of that Spirit that will dwell in us; it needs that we bring our lives up to the height of our present knowledge, and make everything that we know a factor in shaping what we do and what we are. If thus we will to do His will, "we shall know of the doctrine"; if thus we yield ourselves to the Divine Spirit, we shall be taught the practical bearings of all essential truth; and if thus we ponder the facts and principles that are enshrined in Christ's life, and the apostolic commentary on them, as preserved for us in the Scripture, we shall not need to envy those that could go to Him with their questions, for *He* will come to *us* with His all-satisfying answers.

Ah! but you say experience does not verify these promises. Look at a divided Christendom; look at my own difficulties of knowing what I am to believe

and to think. Well, as for a divided Christendom, saintly souls are all of one Church. And however they may formulate the intellectual aspects of their creed, when they come to pray they say the same things. Roman Catholic and Protestant, and Quaker and Churchman, and Calvinist and Arminian, and Greek and Latin Christians—all contribute to the hymn-book of every sect; and we all sing their songs. So the divisions are like the surface cracks on a dry field, and a few inches down there is continuity. As for the difficulty of knowing what I am to believe and think about controverted questions, no doubt there will remain many gaps in the circle of our knowledge; no doubt there will be much left obscure and unanswered; but if we will keep ourselves near the Master, and use honestly and diligently the helps that He gives us—the outward help in the Word, and the inward help in His teaching Spirit—we shall not walk in darkness, but shall have light enough given to be to us the Light of Life.

Brother, keep close to Christ, and Christ—present though absent—will teach you.

II.—Secondly, satisfied desires.

This second great promise of my text, introduced again by the solemn affirmation, “Verily, verily, I say unto you,” substantially appeared in a former part of these discourses with a very significant difference. “Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do.” “If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it.” There Christ presented Himself as the Answerer of the petitions, because His more immediate purpose was to set forth His going to the Father as His elevation to a yet loftier position. Here, on the other

hand, He sets forth the Father as the Answerer of the petitions, because His purpose is to point away from undue dependence on His own corporeal presence. But the fact that He thus, as occasion required, substitutes the one form of speech for the other, and indifferently represents the same actions as being done by Himself and by the Father in heaven, carries with it large teachings which I do not dwell upon now. Only I would ask you to consider how much is involved in that fact, that, as a matter of course, and without explanation of the difference, our Lord alternates the two forms, and sometimes says, "I will do it," and sometimes says, "The Father will do it." Does it not point to that great and blessed truth, "Whatsoever thing the Father doeth, that also doeth the Son likewise?"

But passing from that, let me ask you to note very carefully the limitation, which is here given to the broad universality of the declaration that desires shall be satisfied. "If ye shall ask anything in My name." There is the definition of Christian prayer. And what does it mean? Is a prayer, which from the beginning to the end is reeking with self-will, hallowed because we say, as a kind of charm at the end of it, "For Christ's sake. Amen"? Is that praying in Christ's name? Surely not! What is the name of Christ? His whole revealed character. So these disciples could not pray in His name "hitherto," because His character was not all revealed. Therefore, to pray in His name is to pray, recognizing what He is, as revealed in His life and death and Resurrection and Ascension, and to base all our dependence of acceptance of our prayers upon that revealed char-

acter. Is that all? Are any kind of wishes, which are presented in dependence upon Christ as our only hope and channel of Divine blessing, certain to be fulfilled? Certainly not! To pray "in My name" means yet more than that. It means not only to pray in dependence upon Christ as our only ground of hope and source of acceptance and God's only channel of blessing, but it means exactly what the same phrase means when it is applied to us. If I say that I am doing something in your name, that means on your behalf, as your representative, as your organ, and to express your mind and will. And if we pray in Christ's name, that implies, not only our dependence upon His merits and work, but also the harmony of our wills with His will, and that our requests are not merely the hot products of our own selfishness, but are the calm issues of communion with Him. *Thus* to pray requires the suppression of self. Heathen prayer, if there be such a thing, is the violent effort to make God will what I wish. Christian prayer is the submissive effort to make my wish what God wills. And that is to pray in Christ's name.

My brother, do we construe our prayers thus? Do we try to bring our desires into harmony with Him, before we venture to express them? Do we go to His footstool to pour out petulant, blind, passionate, unsanctified wishes after questionable and contingent good, or to wait until He fills our spirits with longings after what it must be His desire to give, and then to breathe out those desires caught from His own heart, and echoing His own will? Ah! The discipline that is wanted to make men pray in Christ's name is little understood by multitudes amongst us.

Notice how certain such prayer is of being answered. Of course, if it is in harmony with the will of God, it is sure not to be offered in vain. Our Revised Version makes a slight alteration in the order of the words in the first clause of this promise by reading, "If ye ask anything of the Father He will give it you *in My name*." God's gifts come down through the same channel through which our prayer goes up. We ask in the name of Christ, and get our answers in the name of Christ.

But, whether that be the true collocation of ideas or no, mark the plain principle here, that only desires which are in harmony with the Divine will are sure of being satisfied. What is a bad thing for a child cannot be a good thing for a man. What is a foolish and wicked thing for a father to do down here cannot be a kind and a wise thing for the Father in the heavens to do. If you want to spoil your child you say, "What do you want, my dear? tell me and you shall have it." And if God were saying anything like that to us, through the lips of Jesus Christ His Son, in the text, it would be no blessing, but a curse. He knows a great deal better what is good for us; and so He says: "Bring your wishes into line with My purpose, and then you will get them;" "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of thine heart." If you want God most you will be sure to get Him; if your heart's desires are after Him, your heart's desires will be satisfied. "The young lions do roar and suffer hunger." That is the world's way of getting good; fighting and striving and snarling, and forcibly seeking to grasp. And there is hunger after all. There is a better way than that. Instead

of striving and struggling and fighting to snatch and to keep a perishable and questionable portion, let us wait upon God and quiet our hearts, stilling them into the temper of communion and conformity with Him, and we shall not ask in vain.

He who prays in Christ's name must pray Christ's prayer, "Not My will, but Thine be done." And then, though many wishes may be unanswered, and many weak petitions unfulfilled, and many desires unsatisfied, the essential spirit of the prayer will be answered, and, His will being done in us and on us, our wishes will acquiesce in it and desire nothing besides. To him who can thus pray in Christ's name in the deepest sense, and after Christ's pattern, every door in God's treasure-house flies open, and he may take as much of the treasure as he desires. The Master bends lovingly over such a soul, and looks him in the eyes, and with outstretched hand says, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

III.—Lastly, the perfect joy which follows upon these two.

"That your joy may be fulfilled." Again we have a recurrence of a promise that has appeared in another connection in an earlier part of this discourse; but the connection here is worthy of notice. The promise is of joy that comes from the satisfaction of meek desires in unison with Christ's will. Is it possible, then, that, amidst all the ups and downs, the changes and the sorrows of this fluctuating, tempest-tossed life of ours, we may have a deep and stable joy? "That your joy may be full," says my text, or "fulfilled," like some jewelled, golden cup charged to

the very brim with rich and quickening wine, so that there is no room for a drop more. Can it be that ever, in this world, men shall be happy up to the very limits of their capacity? Was anybody ever so blessed that he could not be more so? Was your cup ever so full that there was no room for another drop in it? Jesus Christ says that it may be so, and He tells us how it may be so. Bring your desires into harmony with God's, and you will have none unsatisfied amongst them; and so you will be blessed to the full; and though sorrow comes, as of course it will come, still we may be blessed. There is no contradiction between the presence of this deep, central joy and a surface and circumference of sorrow. Rather we need the surrounding sorrow, to concentrate, and so to intensify, the central joy in God. There are some flowers which only blow in the night; and white blossoms are visible with startling plainness in the twilight, when all the flaunting purples and reds are hid. We do not know the depth, the preciousness, the power of the joy of the Lord, until we have felt it shining in our hearts in the midst of the thick darkness of earthly sorrow, and bringing life into the very death of our human delights. It may be ours on the conditions that my text describes.

My dear friends, there are only two courses before us. Either we must have a life with superficial, transitory, incomplete gladnesses, and an aching centre of vacuity and pain, or we may have a life which, in its outward aspects and superficial appearance, has much about it that is sad and trying, but down in the heart of it is calm and joyful. Which of the two do you deem best, a superficial gladness

and a rooted sorrow, or a superficial sorrow and a central joy?

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.” But, on the other hand, the “ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”



XXXI.

The Joys of "That Day."

"These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in My Name: and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God."
—JOHN xvi. 25—27.



THE stream which we have been tracking for so long in these discourses has now nearly reached its close. Our Lord, in these all but final words, sums up the great salient features which He has already more than once specified, of the time when His followers shall live with an absent and yet present Christ. He reiterates here substantially just what He has been saying before, but in somewhat different connection, and with some slight expansion. And this reiteration of the glad features of the day which was about to dawn suggests how much the disciples needed, and how much we need, to have repeated over and over again the blessed and profound lessons of these words.

What a sublime self-repression there was in the

Master ! Not one word escapes from His lips of the personal pain and agony into which He had to plunge and be baptized, before that day could dawn. All that was crushed down and kept back, and He only speaks to the disciples and to us of the joy that comes to them, and not at all of the bitter sorrow by which it is bought. There are in these words, as it seems to me, especially three characteristics which belong to the whole period between the Ascension of Jesus Christ and His coming again for judgment. It is a day of continual and clearer teaching by Him. It is a day of desires in His name. It is a day of filial experience of a Father's love. These are the characteristics of the Christian period, and they ought to be the characteristics of our individual Christian life. My brother ! are they the characteristics of yours ?

Let us note them in order.

I.—First, our Lord tells us that the whole period of the Christian life upon earth is to be a period of continuous and clearer teaching by Himself.

"Hitherto I have spoken to you in proverbs," or parables. The word means, not only a comparison or parable, but also, and perhaps primarily, a mysterious and enigmatical saying. The reference is, of course, directly to the immediately preceding thoughts, in which His departure and the sorrow that accompanied it and was to merge into joy, were described under that touching figure of the woman in travail. But the reference must be extended very much further than that. It includes not only this discourse, but the whole of His teaching by word whilst He was here upon earth.

Now the first thing that strikes me here is this strange fact. Here is a man who knew Himself to be within four-and-twenty hours of His death, and knew that scarcely another word of instruction was to come from His lips upon earth, calmly asserting that, for all the subsequent ages of the world's history, He is to continue its Teacher. We know how the wisest and profoundest of earthly teachers have their lips sealed by death, so as that no counsel can come from them any more, and their disciples long in vain for responses from the silenced oracle, which is dumb whatever new problems may arise. But Jesus Christ calmly poses before the world as not having His teaching activity in the slightest degree suspended by that fact which puts a conclusive and complete close to all other teachers' words. Rather He says that after death He will, more clearly than in life, be the Teacher of the world.

What does He mean by that? Well, remember first of all the facts which followed this saying—the Cross, the Grave, Olivet, the Heavens, the Throne. These were still in the future when He spoke. And have not these—the bitter Passion, the supernatural Resurrection, the triumphant Ascension, and the everlasting session of the Son at the right hand of God—taught the whole world the meaning of the Father's name, and the love of the Father's heart, and the power of the Father's Son, as nothing else, not even the sweetest and tenderest of His utterances, could have taught them? When, then, He declares the continuance of His teaching functions unbroken through death and beyond it, He refers partly to the future facts of His earthly manifes-

tation, and still more does He refer to that continuous teaching which, by that Divine Spirit whom He sends, is granted to every believing soul all through the ages.

This great truth, which recurs over and over again in these discourses of our Lord's, is far too much dropped out of the consciousness and creeds of the modern Christian Church. We call ourselves Christ's disciples. If there be disciples, there must be a Master. His teaching is by no means merely the effect of the recorded facts and utterances of the Lord, preserved here in the Book for us, and to be pondered upon by ourselves, but it is the hourly communication, to waiting hearts and souls that keep themselves near the Lord, of deeper insight into His will, of larger views of His purposes, of a firmer grasp of the contents of Scripture, and a more complete subjection of the whole nature to the truth as it is in Jesus. Christian men and women! do you know anything about what it is to learn of Christ in the sense that He Himself, and no poor human voice like mine, nor even merely the records of His past words and deeds as garnered in these Gospels and expounded by His Apostles, is the source of your growing knowledge of Him? If we would keep our hearts and minds clearer than we do of the babble of earthly voices, and be more loyal and humble and constant and patient in our sitting on the benches in Christ's school till the Master Himself came to give His lessons, these great words of my text would not, as they so often do in the mass of professing Christians, lack the verification of experience and the assurance that it is so with us. Have you sat in Christ's school,

and do you know the secret and illuminative whispers of His teaching? If not, there is something wrong in your Christian character, and something insincere in your Christian profession.

Notice, still further, that our Lord here prefers that subsequent teaching to all that He said upon earth, great and precious as it was. Now I do not mean for one moment to allege that fresh communications of truth, uncontained in Scripture, are given to us in the age-long and continuous teaching of Jesus Christ. That I do not suppose to be the meaning of the great promises before us, for the facts of revelation were finished when He ascended, and the inspired commentary upon the facts of Revelation was completed with these writings which follow the Gospels in our New Testament. But Christ's teaching brings us up to the understanding of the facts and of the commentary upon them which Scripture contains, so that what was parable or proverb, dimly apprehended, mysterious and enigmatical when it was spoken, and what remains mysterious and enigmatical to us until we grow up to it, gradually becomes full of significance and heavy with a plain and certain meaning. This is the teaching which goes on through the ages—the lifting of His children to the level of apprehending more and more of the inexhaustible and complicated wisdom which is stored for us in this Book. The mine has been worked on the surface, but the deeper it goes the richer is the lode; and no ages will exhaust the treasures that are hid in Jesus Christ our Lord.

He uses the new problems, the new difficulties, the new circumstances of each successive age, and of each individual Christian in order to evolve from His word

larger lessons, and to make the earlier lessons more fully and deeply understood. And this generation, with all its new problems, with all its uneasiness about social questions, with all its new attitude to many ancient truths, will find that Jesus Christ is, as He has been to all past generations—the answer to all its doubts, using even these doubts as a means of evolving the deeper harmonies of His Word, and of unveiling in the ancient truth more than former generations have seen in it. "Brethren, I write unto you no new commandment. Again, a new commandment I write unto you." The inexhaustible freshness of the old Word taught us anew, with deeper significance and larger applications, by the everlasting Teacher of the Church, is the hope that shines through these words. I commend to you, dear brethren, the one simple, personal question, Have I submitted myself to that Teacher, and said to men and systems and preachers and books and magazines, and all the rest of the noisy and clamorous tongues that bewilder under pretence of enlightening this generation—have I said to them all, "Hold your peace, and let me, in the silence of my waiting soul, hear the Teacher Himself speak to me. Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth. Teach me Thy way and lead me, for Thou art my Master, and I the humblest of Thy scholars"?

II.—In the next place, another of the glad features of this dawning day is that it is to be a day of desires based upon Christ, and Christlike.

"In that day ye shall ask in My name." Our translators have wisely put a colon at the end of that clause, in order that we may not hurry over it too

quickly in order to get to the next one. For there is a substantial blessing and privilege wrapped up in it. Our Lord has just been saying the same thing in the previous verses, but He repeats it here in order to emphasize it, and to set it by the subsequent words in a somewhat different light. But I dwell upon it for a very simple, practical purpose. I have already explained in former sermons the full, deep meaning of that phrase, "asking in Christ's name," and have suggested to you that it implied two things—the one, that our desires should all be based upon His great work as the only ground of our acceptance with God; and the other, that our desires should all be such as represent His heart and His mind. When we "ask in His name" we ask, first, for His sake, and, second, as in His person. And such desires, resting their hopes of answer solely upon His mighty sacrifice and all-sufficient merit, and shaped accurately and fully after the pattern of the wishes that are dear to His heart, are to be the prerogative and the joy of His servants, in the new "day" that is about to dawn.

Note how beautifully this thought of wishes, moulded into conformity with Jesus Christ, and offered in reliance upon His great sacrifice, follows upon that other thought, "I will tell you plainly of the Father." The Master's voice speaks, revealing the paternal heart; the scholar's voice answers with desires kindled by the knowledge. Longings and aspirations humbly offered for His sake, and after the pattern of His own, are our true response to His teaching voice. As the astronomer, the more powerful his telescope, though it may resolve some of the

nebulae that resisted feebler instruments, only has the bounds of creation enlarged as He looks through it, and sees yet other and mightier star-clouds lying mysterious beyond its ken—so each new influx and tidal wave of knowledge of the Father, which Christ gives to His waiting child, leads on to enlarged desires, to longings to press still further into the unexplored mysteries of that magnificent and boundless land, and to nestle still closer into the infinite heart of God. He declares to us the Father, and the answer of the child to the declaration of the Father is the cry, "Abba! Father! Show me yet more of Thy heart." Thus aspiration and fruition, longing and satisfaction in unsatiated and inexhaustible and unwearying alternation, are the two blessed poles between which the life of a Christian may revolve in smoothness and music.

My friend, is that anything like the transcript of our experience, that the more we know of God, the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him; and the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him, the more full, gracious, confidential, tender, and continuous are the teachings of our Master? Is not that a far higher level of Christian life than we live upon? And why so? Is Christ's word faithless? Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Was this promise of His idle wind? Or is it that you and I have never grasped the fulness of privileges that He bestows upon us?

III.—Note, lastly, that is to be a day of filial experience of a Father's love.

"I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you because ye

have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God." Jesus Christ does not deny His intercession. He simply does not bring it into evidence here. To deny it would have been impossible, for soon afterwards we find Him saying, "I pray for them which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine." But He does not emphasize it here, in order that He may emphasize another blessed source of solace—viz., that to those who listen to the Master's teaching, and have their desires moulded into harmony with His, and their wishes and hopes all based upon His sacrifice and work, the Divine Father's love directly flows. There is no need of any intercession to turn Him to be merciful. Men sometimes caricature the thought of the intercession of Christ, as if it meant that He, by His prayer, bent the reluctant will of the Father in heaven. All such horrible misconceptions Christ sweeps out of the field here, even whilst there remains, in the fact that the prayers of which He is speaking are offered in His name, the substance and reality of all that we mean by the intercession of Jesus Christ.

And now note that God loves the men who love Jesus Christ. So completely does the Father identify Himself with the Son, that love to Christ is love to Him, and brings the blessed answer of His love to us. Whosoever loves Christ loves God.

Whosoever loves Christ must do so, believing that He came forth from God. There are the two characteristics of a Christian disciple—Faith in the Divine mission of the Son, and Love that flows from faith. Now, of course, it does not follow from the words before us, that this Divine love which comes down upon the heart which loves Christ is the original

and first flow of that love towards that heart. "We love Him because He first loved us." Christ is not here tracking the stream to its source, but is pointing to it midway in its flow. If you want to go up to the fountain-head you have to go up to the Divine Father's heart, who loved when there was no love in us; and, because He loved, sent the Son. First comes the unmotivated, spontaneous, self-originated, undeserved, infinite love of God to sinners and aliens and enemies; then the Cross and the mission of Jesus Christ; then the faith in His Divine mission; then the love which is the child of faith, as it grasps the Cross and recognises the love that lies behind it; and then, after that, the special, tender, and paternal love of God falling upon the hearts that love Him in His Son. There is nothing here in the slightest degree to conflict with the grand universal truth that God loves enemies and sinners and aliens. But there is the truth, as precious as the other, that they who "have known and believed the love that God hath to us" live under the selectest influences of His loving heart, and have a place in its tenderness which it is impossible that any should have who do not so love. And that sweet commerce of a Divine love answering a human, which itself is the answer to a prior Divine love, brings with it the firm confidence that prayers in His name shall not be prayers in vain.

So, dear friends, growing knowledge, an ever-present Teacher, the peace of calm desires built upon Christ's Cross and fashioned after Christ's Spirit, and the assurance in my quiet and filial heart that my Father in the heavens loves me, and will neither give

me serpents when I ask for them, thinking them to be fishes, nor refuse bread when I ask for it—these things ought to mark the lives of all professing Christians. Are they our experience? If not, why are they not, but because we do not believe that "Thou art come forth from God," nor love Thee as we ought?



From the Father and to the Father.

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world : again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.”—JOHN xvi. 28.



THESE majestic and strange words are the proper close of our Lord's discourse, what follows being rather a reply to the disciples' exclamation. There is nothing absolutely new in them, but what is new is the completeness and the brevity with which they cover the whole ground of His being, work, and glory. They fall into two halves, each consisting of two clauses ; the former half describing our Lord's *descent*, the latter His *ascent*. In each half the two clauses deal with the same fact, considered from the two opposite ends as it were—the point of departure and the point of arrival. “I came forth *from* the Father, and am come *into* the world : again, I *leave* the world, and go *to* the Father.” But the first point of departure is the last point of arrival, and the end comes round to the beginning. Our Lord's earthly life is, as it were, a jewel enclosed within the flashing gold of His eternal dwelling with God.

So I think we shall best apprehend the scope, and appropriate to ourselves the blessing and power of these words, if we deal with the four points to which they call our attention—the dwelling with the Father; the voluntary coming to the earth; the voluntary departure from the earth; and, once more, the dwelling with the Father. We must grasp them all if we would know the whole Christ and all that He is able to do and to be to us and to the world. So, then, I deal simply with these four points.

I.—Note, then, first, the dwelling with the Father.

If we adopt the most probable reading of the first clause of my text, it is even more forcible than in our version: “I came forth *out of* the Father.” Such an egress implies a being *in* the Father in a sense ineffable for our words, and transcending our thoughts. It implies a far deeper and closer relation than even that of juxtaposition, companionship, or outward presence.

Now, in these great words there is involved obviously, to begin with, that, during His earthly life, our Lord bore about with Him the remembrance and consciousness of an individual existence prior to His life on earth. I need not remind you how frequently such hints drop from His lips—“Before Abraham was, I am,” and the like. But beyond that solemn thought of a remembered previous existence there is this other one—that the words are the assertion by Christ Himself of a previous, deep, mysterious, ineffable union with the Father. On such a subject wisdom and reverence bid us speak only as we hear; but I cannot refrain from emphasizing the fact that, if this fourth Gospel be a genuine record of the teaching of

Jesus Christ—and, if it is not, what genius was he who wrote it?—if it be a genuine record of the teaching of Jesus Christ, then nothing is more plain than that over and over again, in all sorts of ways, by implication and by direct statement, to all sorts of audiences, friends and foes, He reiterated this tremendous claim to have dwelt in the bosom of the Father, long before He lay on the breast of Mary. What did He mean when He said, “No man hath ascended up into heaven save He which came down from heaven”? What did He mean when He said, “What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before”? What did He mean when He said, “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”? And what did He mean when, in the midst of the solemnities of that last prayer, He said, “Glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”?

Dear friends, it seems to me that if we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know *that*. If we cannot believe that He thus spoke, we know nothing about Him on which we can rely. And so, without venturing to enlarge at all upon these solemn words, I leave this with you as a plain fact, that the meekest, lowliest, and most sane and wise of religious teachers made deliberately over and over again this claim, which is either absolutely true, and lifts Him into the region of the Deity, or else is fatal to His pretensions to be either meek or modest, or wise or sane, or a religious teacher to whom it is worth our while to listen.

II.—Note, secondly, the voluntary coming into the world.

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world." We all talk in a loose way about men coming into the world when they are born; but the weight of these words and the solemnity of the occasion in which they were spoken, and the purpose for which they were spoken—viz., to comfort and to illuminate these disciples—forbid us to see such a mere platitude as that in them. There would have been no consolation in them unless they meant something a great deal more than the undeniable fact that Jesus Christ was born, and the melancholy fact that Jesus Christ was about to die.

"I am *come* into the world." There has been a Man who chose to be born. There has been a Man who appeared here, not "by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of blood," but by His own free choice. He willed to take upon Him the form of humanity. Now the voluntariness of the entrance of Jesus Christ into the conditions of our human life is all-important for us, for it underlies the whole value of that life and its whole power to be blessing and good to us. It underlies, for instance, the personal sinlessness of Jesus Christ, and hence His power to bring a new beginning of pure and perfect life into the midst of humanity. All the rest of mankind, knit together by that mysterious bond of natural descent which only now for the first time is beginning to receive its due attention on the part of men of science, by heredity have the taint upon them. And if Jesus Christ is only one of the series, then there is no deliverance in Him, for there is no sinlessness in that life. However fair its record may seem on the surface, there is beneath, somewhere or other the leprosy that infects

us all. Unless He came in another fashion from all the rest of us, He came with the same sin as all the rest of us, and He is no deliverer from sin. Rather He is one of the series who, like the melancholy captives on the road to Siberia, each carry a link of the hopeless chain that binds them all together. But, if it be true that of His own will He took to Himself humanity, and was born as the Scripture tells us He was born, His birth being His coming and not His being brought, then, being free from taint, He can deliver us from taint, and, Himself unbound by the chain, He can break it from off our necks. The stream is fouled from its source downwards, and flows on, every successive drop participant of the primeval pollution. But, down from the white snows of the eternal hills of God, there comes into it an affluent which has no stain on its pure waters, and so can purge that into which it enters. Jesus Christ willed to be born, and to plant a new beginning of holy life in the very heart of humanity which henceforth should work as leaven.

Let me remind you, too, that this voluntary assumption of our nature is all-important to us, for unless we preserve it clear in our minds and hearts, the power to sway our affections is struck away from Jesus Christ. Unless He voluntarily took upon Himself the nature which He meant to redeem, why should I be thankful to Him for what He did? And what right has He to claim my love? But if He willingly came down amongst us, and "to this end was born, and for this cause," of His own loving heart, came into the world, then I am knit to Him by cords that cannot be broken. One thing only saves Jesus Christ

for the unbounded and perpetual love of mankind, and that is, that from His own infinite and perpetual love He came into the world. We talk about kings leaving their palaces and putting on the rags of the beggar, and learning "love in huts where poor men lie," and making experience of the conditions of their lowliest subjects. But here is a fact, infinitely beyond all these legends. It is set forth for us in a touching fashion, in the incident that almost immediately preceded these parting words of our Lord, when "Jesus, knowing that He came forth from God, laid aside His garments and took a towel, and girded Himself," and washed the foul feet of these travel-stained men. That was a parable of the Incarnation. The consciousness of His Divine origin was ever with Him, and that consciousness led Him to lay aside the garments of His majesty, and to gird Himself with the towel of service. That He had a body round which to wrap it was more humiliation than that He wrapped it round the body which He took. And we may learn there what it is that gives Him His supreme right to our devotion and our surrender—viz., that, "being in the form of God, He thought not equality with God a thing to be covetously retained, but made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man."

III.—Note the voluntary leaving the world.

The stages of that departure are not distinguished. They are threefold in fact—the Death, the Resurrection, the Ascension. And in all three we have the majestic, spontaneous energy of Christ as their cause.

There was a voluntary death. I have so often had

occasion to insist upon that, in the course of these sermons, that I do not need to dwell upon it now. Let me remind you only how distinctly and in what various forms that thought is presented to us in the Scriptures. We have our Lord's own words about His having power to lay down His life. We have in the story of the Passion hints that seem to suggest that His relation to death, to which He is about to bow His head, was altogether different from that of ours. For instance, we read: "Into Thy hands I *commit* My Spirit"; and "He *gave up* the Spirit." We have hints of a similar nature in the very swiftness of His death and unexpected brevity of His suffering, to be accounted for by no natural result of the physical process of crucifixion. The fact is that Jesus Christ is the Lord of death, and was so even when He seemed to be its servant, and that He never showed Himself more completely the Prince of Life and the Conqueror of Death than when He gave up His life and died, not because He must, but because He would. There is a scene in a modern book of fiction of a man sitting on a rock and the ocean stretching round him. It reaches high upon his breast, but it threatens not his life, till he, sitting there in his calm, bows his head beneath the wave and lets it roll over him. So Christ willed to die, and died because He willed.

There was also a voluntary resurrection by His own power; for although Scripture sometimes represents His rising again from the dead as being the Father's attestation of the Son's finished work, it also represents it as being, in accordance with His own claim of "power to lay down My life, and to take it

again," the Son's triumphant egress from the prison into which, for the moment, He willed to pass. Jesus "was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," but also Jesus rose from the dead by His own power.

There was also a voluntary ascension to the heavens. There was no need for Elijah's chariot of fire. There was no need for a whirlwind to sweep a mortal to the sky. There was no need for any external vehicle or agency whatsoever. No angels bore Him up upon their wings. But, the cords of duty which bound Him to earth being cut, He rose to His own native sphere; and, if one might so say, the natural forces of His supernatural life bore Him, by inverted gravitation, upward to the place which was His own. He ascended by His own inherent power.

Thus, by a voluntary death, He became the Sacrifice for our sins; by the might of His self-effected Resurrection He proclaimed Himself the Lord of death and the Resurrection for all that trust Him; and by ascending up on high He draws our heart's desires after Him, so that we, too, as we see Him lost from our sight, behind the bright Shekinah cloud that stooped to conceal the last stages of His voyage from our view, may return to our lowly work with great joy, and set our affections on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

IV.—So, lastly, we have here the dwelling again with the Father.

But that final dwelling with God is not wholly identical with the initial one. The earthly life was no mere parenthesis, and He who returned to the Throne carried with Him the manhood which He had assumed, and bore it thither into the glory in which

the Word had dwelt from the beginning. And this is the true consolation which Christ offered to these His weeping servants, and which He still offers to us His waiting children, that now the manhood of Jesus Christ is exalted to participation in the Divine glory, and dwells there in the calm, invisible sweetness and solemnity of fellowship with the Father.

If that be so, it is no mere abstract dogma of theology, but it touches our daily life at all points, and is essential to the fulness of our satisfaction and our rest in Christ.

“We see not all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.” Our Brother is elevated to the Throne, and, if I might so say, He makes the fortunes of the family, and none of them will be poor as long as He is so rich. He sends us from the far-off land where He is gone precious gifts of its produce, and He will send for us to share His Throne one day.

Christ’s Ascension to the Father is the elevation of our best and dearest Friend to the Throne of the Universe, and the hands that were pierced for us on the cross hold the helm and sway the sceptre of Creation, and therefore we may calmly meet all events.

The elevation of Jesus Christ to the Throne fills Heaven for our faith, our imagination, and our hearts. How different it is to look up into those awful abysses, and to wonder where, amidst their crushing infinitude, the spirits of dear ones that are gone are wandering, if they are at all; and to look up and to think “My Christ hath passed through the Heavens,” and is somewhere with a true Body, and with Him all that loved Him! Without an ascended Christ we recoil from the cold splendours of an unknown

Heaven, as a savage might from the unintelligible magnificence of a palace. But if we believe that He is at the right hand of God, then the far-off becomes near, and the vague becomes definite, and the unsubstantial becomes solid, and what was a fear becomes a joy, and we can trust ourselves and the dear dead in His hands, knowing that where He is they are, and that in Him they and we have all we need.

So, dear friends, it all comes to this—make sure that you have hold of the whole Christ for yourselves. His earthly life is little without that celestial halo that rings it round. His life is nothing without His death. His death without His resurrection and ascension may be a little more pathetic than millions of other deaths, but is nothing, really, to us. And the life and death and resurrection are not apprehended in their fullest power until they are set between the eternal glory before and the eternal glory after.

These four facts—the dwelling with the Father; the voluntary coming to earth; the voluntary leaving earth; and, again, the dwelling with the Father—are the walls of the strong fortress into which we may flee and be safe. With them it “stands four square to every wind that” blows. Strike away one of them, and it totters into ruin. Make the whole Christ your Christ; for nothing less than the whole Christ, “conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, . . . crucified, dead, and buried, . . . ascended into Heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God,” is strong enough to help your infirmities, vast enough to satisfy your desires, loving enough to love you as you need, or able to deliver you from your sins, and to lift you to the glories of His own Throne.

XXXIII.

The Disciples' Confession and the Master's Warning.

“His disciples said unto Jesus, Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee : by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe ? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone : and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”—JOHN xvi. 29—32.



THE first words of these wonderful discourses were, “Let not your heart be troubled.” They struck the key-note of the whole. The aim of all was to bring peace and confidence unto the disciples’ spirits. And this joyful burst of confession, which wells up so spontaneously and irrepressibly from their hearts, shows that the aim has been reached. For a moment sorrow, bewilderment, dulness of apprehension, had all passed away, and the foolish questioners and non-receptive listeners had been lifted into a higher region, and possess insight, courage, confidence. The last sublime utterance of our Lord had gathered all the scattered rays into a

beam so bright that the blindest could not but see, and the coldest could not but be warmed.

But yet the calm, clear eye of Christ sees something not wholly satisfactory in this outpouring of the disciples' confidence. He does not reject their imperfect faith, but He warns them, seeing the impending hour of denial which was so terribly to contradict the rapture of that moment. And then, with most pathetic suddenness, He passes from them to Himself; and in a singularly blended utterance lets us get a glimpse into His deep solitude and the companions that shared it.

My words this morning make no attempt at any further connection than is involved in following the course of thought in the words before us.

I.—Note the disciples' joyful confession.

Their words are permeated throughout with allusions to the previous promises and sayings of our Lord, and the very allusions show how shallow was their understanding of what they thought so plain. He had said to them that, in that coming day which was so near its dawn, He would speak to them no more in proverbs, but show them plainly of the Father; and they answer, with a kind of rapture of astonishment, that the promised day has come already, and that even now He is speaking to them plainly, and without mysterious sayings. Did they understand His words when they thought them so plain? "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again I leave the world and go unto the Father." That summary statement of the central mysteries of Christianity, which the generations have found to be inexhaustible, and which to so many minds has been

absolutely incredible, seemed to the shallow apprehension of these disciples to be sun-clear. If they had understood what He meant, could they have spoken thus, or have left Him so soon?

They begin with what they believed to be a fact, His clear utterance. Then follows a conviction which they infer from the fact, and rightly infer, and which has allusion to His previous words. "Now," say they, "we know that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee." He had said to them, "In that day ye shall ask Me nothing;" and from the fact that He had interpreted their unspoken words, and had anticipated their desire to ask what they durst not ask, they draw, and rightly draw, the conclusion of His Divine Omniscience. They think that therein, in His answer to their question before it is asked, is the fulfilment of that great promise. Was that all that He meant? Certainly not. Did He merely mean to say, "You will ask Me nothing, because I shall know what you want to know, without your asking?" No! But He meant, "Ye shall ask Me nothing, because in that day you will have with you an illuminating Spirit who will solve all your difficulties." So, again, a shallow interpretation empties the words which they accept of their deepest and most precious meaning.

And then they take yet a further step. First, they begin with a fact; then from that they infer a conviction; and now, upon the basis of the inferred conviction, they rear a faith. "We believe that Thou camest forth from God." But what they meant by "coming forth from God" fell far short of the greatness of what He meant by the declaration, and they

stand, in this final, articulate confession of their faith, but a little in advance of Nicodemus the Rabbi, and behind Peter the Apostle when he said: "Thou art the Son of the living God."

So their confession is a strangely mingled warp and woof of insight and of ignorance. And they may stand for us both as examples to teach us what we ought to be, and as beacons teaching us what we should not be.

Let me note just one or two lessons drawn from the disciples' demeanour and confession.

The first remark that I would make is that here we learn what it is that gives life to a creed—Experience. These men had, over and over again, in our Lord's earlier utterances, heard the declaration that "He came forth from God"; and in a sort of fashion they believed it. But, as so many of our convictions do, it lay dormant and half dead in their souls. But now, rightly or wrongly, experience had brought them into contact, as they thought, with a manifest proof of His Divine Omniscience, and the torpid conviction flashes all up at once into vitality. The smouldering fire of a mere piece of abstract belief was kindled at once into a glow that shed warmth through their whole hearts; and although they had professed to believe long ago that He came from God, now, for the first time, they grasp it as a living reality. Why? Because experience had taught it to them. That is the only thing that teaches us the articles of our creed in a way worth learning them. Every one of us carries professed beliefs, which lie there inoperative, bedridden, in the hospital and dormitory of our souls, until some great necessity or sudden circumstance

comes that flings a beam of light upon them and then they start and waken. We do not know the use of the sword until we are in battle. Until the shipwreck comes, no man puts on the lifebelt in his cabin. Every one of us has large tracts of Christian truth which we think we most surely believe, but which need experience to quicken them, and need us to grow up into the possession of them. Of all our teachers who turn beliefs assented to into beliefs really believed none is so mighty as sorrow; for that makes a man lay a firm hold on the deep things of God's Word.

Then another lesson that I draw from this glad confession is—the bold avowal that always accompanies certitude. These men's stammering tongues are loosed. They have a fact to base themselves upon. They have a piece of assured knowledge inferred from the fact. They have a faith built upon the certitude of what they know. Having this, out it all comes in a gush. No man that believes with all his heart can help speaking. You silent Christians are so, because you do not more than half grasp the truth that you say you hold. "Thy word, when shut up in my bones, was like a fire"; and it ate its way through all the dead matter that enclosed it, until at last it flamed out heaven high. Can you say, "We know and we believe," with unfaltering confidence? Not "we argue;" not "we humbly venture to think that on the whole;" not "we are inclined rather to believe;" but "*we know* that Thou knowest all things, and that Thou hast come from God." Seek for that blessed certitude of knowledge, based upon the facts of individual experience, which makes the tongue of

the dumb sing, and changes all the deadness of an outward profession of Christianity into a living, rejoicing power.

Then, further, I draw this lesson. Take care of indolently supposing that you understand the depths of God's truth.

These apostles fancied that they had grasped the whole meaning of the Master's words, and were glad in them. They fed on them, and got something out of them; but how far they were from the true perception of their meaning! This generation abhors mystery, and demands that the deepest truths of the highest subject, which is religion, shall be so broken down into mincemeat that the "man in the street" can understand them in the intervals of reading the newspaper. There are only too many of us who are disposed to grasp at the most superficial interpretation of Christian truth, and lazily to rest ourselves in that. A creed which has no depth in it is like a picture which has no distance. It is flat and unnatural, and self-condemned by the very fact. It is better that we should feel that the smallest word that comes from God is like some little leaf of a water plant on the surface of a pond; if you lift that you draw a whole trail after it, and nobody knows how far off and how deep down are the roots. It is better that we should feel how Infinity and Eternity press in upon us on all sides, and should take as ours the temper that recognizes that till the end we are but learners, seeing "in a glass, in a riddle," and therefore patiently waiting for light and strenuously striving to stretch our souls to the width of the infinite truth of God.

II.—So, then, look, in the second place, at the sad questions and forebodings of the Master.

“Do ye *now* believe?” That does not cast doubt on the reality of their faith so much as on its permanence and power. “Behold the hour cometh that ye shall be scattered”—as He had told them a little while before in the upper room, like a flock when the shepherd is stricken down—“Every man to his own.” He does not reject their imperfect homage, though He discerns so clearly its imperfection and its transiency, but sadly warns them to beware of the fleeting nature of their present emotion; and would seek to prepare them, by the knowledge, for the terrible storm that is going to break upon them.

So let us learn two or three simple lessons. One is that the dear Lord accepts imperfect surrender, ignorant faith and love, of which He knows that it will soon turn to denial. Oh! if He did not, what would become of us all? *We* reject half hearts; we will not have a friendship on which we cannot rely. The sweetness of vows is all sucked out of them to our apprehension, if we have reason to believe that they will be falsified in an hour. But the patient Master was willing to put up with what you and I will not put up with; and to accept what we reject; and be pleased that they gave Him even that. His “charity suffereth long, and is kind.” Let us not be afraid to bring even imperfect consecration—

“A little faith all undisproved,”—

to His merciful feet.

Then another lesson is the need for Christian men sedulously to search and make sure that their inward

life corresponds with their words and professions. I wonder how many thousands of people will stand up this day and say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son," whose words would stick in their throats if that question of the Master's was put to them, "*Do ye now believe?*" And I wonder how many of us are the fools of our own verbal acknowledgments of Christ. Self-examination is not altogether a wholesome exercise, and it may easily be carried too far, to the destruction of the spontaneity and the gladness of the Christian life. A man may set his pulse going irregularly by simply concentrating his attention upon it, and there may be self-examination of the wrong sort, which does harm rather than good. But, on the other hand, we all need to verify our position, lest our outward life should fatally slip away from correspondence with our inward. Our words and acts of Christian profession and service are like bank notes. What will be the end if there is a whole ream of such going up and down the world, and no balance of bullion in the cellars to meet them? Nothing but bankruptcy. Do you see to it that your reserve of gold, deep down in your hearts, always leaves a margin beyond the notes in circulation issued by you. And in the midst of your professions hear the Master saying, "*Do ye now believe?*"

Another lesson that I draw is, trust no emotions, no religious experiences, but only Him to whom they turn.

These men were perfectly sincere, and there was a glow of gladness in their hearts, and a real though imperfect faith when they spoke. In an hour's time where were they?

We often deal far too hard measure to these poor disciples, in our estimate of their conduct at that critical moment. We talk about them as cowards. Well, they were better and they were worse than cowards; for their courage failed second, but their faith had failed first. The Cross made them dastards because it destroyed their confidence in Jesus Christ.

"We trusted." Ah! what a world of sorrow there is in those two final letters of that word. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." But they do not trust it any more, and so why should they put themselves in peril for One on whom their faith can no longer build?

Would we have been any better if we had been there? Suppose you had stood afar off and seen Jesus die on the cross, would your faith have lived? Do we not know what it is to be a great deal more exuberant in our professions of faith—and real faith it is, no doubt—in some quiet hour when we are with Him by ourselves, than when swords are flashing and we are in the presence of His antagonists? Do we not know what it is to grasp conviction at one moment, and the next to find it gone like a handful of mist from our clutch? Is our Christian life always lived upon one high uniform level? Have we no experience of hours of exhaustion coming after deep religious emotion? "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." There will not be many stones flung if that law be applied. Let us all, recognizing our own weakness, trust to nothing, either in our convictions or our emotions, but only to Him, and cry, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

III.—Lastly, note the lonely Christ and His companion.

“Ye shall leave me alone.” There is sadness, though it be calm, in that clause. And then, I suppose, there was a moment’s pause before the quiet voice began again. “And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me.” There are two currents there, both calm; but the one bright and the other dark.

Jesus was the loneliest man that ever lived. All other forms of human solitude were concentrated in His. He knew the pain of unappreciated aims, unaccepted love, unbelieved teachings, a heart thrown back upon itself. No man understood Him, no man knew Him, no man deeply and thoroughly loved Him or sympathized with Him, and He dwelt apart. He felt the pain of solitude more sharply than sinful men do. Perfect purity is keenly susceptible; a heart fully charged with love is wounded sore when the love is thrown back, and all the more sorely the more unselfish it is.

Solitude was no small part of the pain of Christ’s passion. Remember the pitiful appeal in Gethsemane, “Tarry ye here and watch with Me.” Remember the threefold vain returns to the sleepers in the hope of finding some sympathy from them. Remember the emphasis with which, more than once in His life, He foretold the loneliness of His death. And then let us understand how the bitterness of the cup that He drank had for not the least bitter of its ingredients the sense that He drank it all alone.

Now, dear friends, some of us, no doubt, have to live outwardly solitary lives. We all of us live alone after

all fellowship and communion. Physicists tell us that in the most solid bodies the atoms do not touch. Hearts come closer than atoms, but yet, after all, we die alone, and in the depths of our souls we all live alone. So let us be thankful that the Master knows the bitterness of solitude, and has Himself trod that path.

Then we have the calm consciousness of unbroken communion. Jesus Christ's sense of union with the Father was deep, close, constant, in manner and measure altogether transcending any experience of ours. But still He sets before us a pattern of what we should aim at in these great words. They show the path of comfort for every lonely heart. "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." If earth be dark, let us look to Heaven. If the world with its millions seems to have no friend in it for us, let us turn to Him who never leaves us. If dear ones are torn from our grasp, let us grasp God. Solitude is bitter; but, like other bitters, it is a tonic. It is not all loss if the trees, which with their leafy beauty shut out the sky from us are felled, and so we see the blue.

Christ's company is to us what the Father's fellowship was to Christ. He has borne solitude that He might be the companion of all the lonely. And the same voice which said, "Ye shall leave Me alone," said also, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

But *that* communion of Christ with the Father was broken, in that awful hour when He cried: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We tread there on the verge of mysteries beyond our comprehension; but this we know—that it was our sin and the world's,

made His by His willing identifying of Himself with us, which built up that black wall of separation. That hour of utter desolation, forsaken by God, deserted by men, was the hour of the world's redemption. And Jesus Christ was forsaken by God and deserted by men, that you and I might never be either the one or the other, but might find in His sweet and constant companionship at once the society of a man and the presence of a God.



Peace and Victory.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.”—JOHN xvi. 33.



O end these wonderful discourses, and so ends our Lord's teaching before His passion. He gathers up in one mighty word the total intention of these sweet and deep sayings which we have so long been pondering together. He sketches in broad outline the continual characteristics of the disciple's life, and closes all with the strangest shout of victory, even at the moment when He seems most utterly defeated.

We shall, I think, best lay on our hearts and minds the spirit and purpose of these words if we simply follow their course, and look at the three things which Christ emphasizes here: the inward peace which is His purpose for us ; the outward tribulation which is our certain fate ; and the courageous confidence which Christ's victory for us gives.

I.—Note, then, first, the inward peace.

“These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace.” Peace is not lethargy; and it is very remarkable to notice how, in immediate connection with this great promise, there occur words which suggest its opposite—tribulation and battle. “In the world ye have tribulation.” “I have overcome”—that means a fight. These are to go side by side with the peace that He promises. The two conditions belong to two different spheres. The Christian life bifurcates, as it were, into a double root, and moves in two realms—“in Me” and “in the world.” And the predicates and characteristics of these two lives are, in a large measure, diametrically opposite. So here, without any contradiction, our Lord brackets together the two opposite conditions as both pertaining to the life of a devout soul. He promises a peace which co-exists with tribulation and disturbance, a peace which is realized in and through conflict and struggle. The tree will stand, with its deep roots and its firm bole, unmoved, though wildest winds may toss its branches and scatter its leaves. In the fortress, beleaguered by the sternest foes, there may be, right in the very centre of the citadel, a quiet oratory through whose thick walls the noise of battle and the shout of victory or defeat can never penetrate. So we may live in a centre of rest, however wild may be the uproar in the circumference. “In Me . . . peace.” That is the innermost life. “In the world . . . tribulation.” That is only the surface.

But, then, note that this peace, which exists with, and is realized through, tribulation and strife, depends upon certain conditions. Our Lord does not say, “Ye have peace,” but “These things I have spoken

that you *may* have it." It is a possibility; and He lays down distinctly and plainly here the twofold set of conditions, in fulfilment of which a Christian disciple may dwell secure and still, in the midst of all confusion. Note, then, these two.

It is peace, if we have it all, *in Him*. Now you remember how emphatically and loftily, as one of the very key-notes of these discourses, our Lord has spoken to us, in them, of dwelling in Him as the prerogative and the duty of every Christian. We are in Him as in an atmosphere. In Him our true lives are rooted as a tree in the soil. We are in Him as a branch in the vine, in Him as the members in a body, in Him as the residents in a house. We are in Him by simple faith, by the trust that rests all upon Him, by the love that finds all in Him, by the obedience that does all for Him. And it is only when we are in Christ that we rest, and realize peace. All else brings distraction. Even delights trouble. The world may give excitement, the world may give vulgar and fleeting joys, the world may give stimulus to much that is good and true in us, but there is only one thing that gives peace, and that is that our hearts should dwell in the Fortress, and should ever be surrounded by Jesus Christ. Brother! let nothing tempt us down from the heights, and out from the citadel where alone we are at rest; but in the midst of all the pressing duties, the absorbing cares, the carking anxieties, the seducing temptations of the world, and in the presence of all the necessity for noble conflict which the world brings to every man that is not its slave, let us try to keep the roots of our lives in contact with that soil from which they

draw all their nourishment, and to wrap ourselves round with the life of Jesus Christ, which shall make an impenetrable shield between us and the fiery darts of the wicked. Keep on the lee side of the break-water and your little cock-boat will ride out the gale. Keep Christ between you and the hurtling storm, and there will be a quiet place below the wall where you may rest, hearing not the loud winds when they call. "These things have I spoken that in Me ye might have peace."

But there is another condition. Christ speaks the great words which have been occupying us so long, that they may bring to us peace. I need not do more than remind you, in a sentence, of the contents of these wonderful discourses. Think of how they have spoken to us of our Brother's Ascension to Heaven to prepare a place for us; of His coming again to receive us to Himself; of His presenee with us in His absence; of His indwelling in us and ours in Him; of His gift to us of a Divine spirit. If we believed all these things; if we realized them and lived in the faith of them; if we meditated upon them in the midst of our daily duties; and if they were real to us, and not mere words written down in a Book, how should anything be able to disturb us, or to shake our settled confidence? Cleave to the words of the Master, and let them pour into our hearts the quietness and confidence which nothing else can give. And then, whatsoever storms may be around, the heart will be at rest. We find peace nowhere else but where Mary found her repose, and could shake off care and trouble about many things, sitting at the feet of Jesus, wraup in His love and listening to His word.

II.—Then note, secondly, the outward tribulation which is the certain fate of His followers.

Of course there is a very sad and true sense in which the warning, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," applies to all men. Pain and sickness, loss and death, the monotony of hard, continuous, unwelcome toil, hopes blighted or disappointed even in their fruition, and all the other ills that flesh is heir to afflict us all. But our Lord is not speaking here about the troubles that befall men as men, nor about the chastisement that befalls them as sinners, nor about the evils which dog them because they are mortal or because they are bad, but of the yet more mysterious sorrows which fall upon them because they are good. "In the world ye have tribulation" is the proper rendering and reading. It had already begun, and it was to be the standing condition and certain fate of all that followed Him.

I have already said that the Christian life moves in two spheres, and hence there must necessarily be antagonism and conflict. Whoever realizes the inward life in Christ will more or less, and sooner or later, find himself coming into hostile collision with lives which only move on the surface and belong to the world. If you and I are Christians after the pattern of Jesus Christ, then we dwell in the midst of an order of things which is not constituted on or for the principles that regulate our lives and the objects at which we aim. And hence, in that fundamental discordance between the Christian life and society as it is constituted, there must always be, if there be honesty and consistency on the side of the Christian man, more or less of collision between him and it. All

that you regard as axiomatic the world regards as folly, if you take Christ for your teacher. All that you labour to secure the world does not care to possess, if you have Him for your aim. All that you live to seek it has abandoned; all that you desire to obey it will not even consult, if you are taking Christ and His law for your rule. And therefore there must come, sooner or later, and more or less intensely in all Christian lives, opposition and tribulation. You cannot get away from the necessity, so it is as well to face it.

No doubt the form of antagonism varies. No doubt the more the world is penetrated by Christian principles divorced from their root and source, the less vehement and painful will the collision be. But *there* is the gulf, and there it will stop, until the world is a Church. No doubt some portion of the battlements of organized Christianity has tumbled into the ditch, and made it a little less deep. Christians have dropped their standard far too much, and so the antagonism is not so plain as it ought to be, and as it used to be, and as, some day, it will be. But there it is, and if you are going to live out and out like a Christian man, you will get the old sneers flung at you. You will be "erohety," "impracticable," "spoiling sport," "not to be dealt with," "wet blanket," "pharisaical," "bigoted," and all the rest of the pretty words which have been so frequently used about the men that try to live like Jesus Christ. Never mind. "In the world ye have tribulation." "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," the branding-iron which tells whose owner the slave is. And if it is His initials that I carry I may be proud of the marks.

But at any rate there will be antagonism. You young men in your warehouses, you men that go on 'Change, we people that live by our pens or our tongues, and find ourselves in opposition to much of the tendencies of the present day—we have all, in our several ways, to bear the cross. Do not let us be ashamed of it, and, above all, do not let us, for the sake of easing our shoulders, be unfaithful to our Master. "In the world ye have tribulation": and the Christian man's peace has to be like the rainbow that lives above the cataract—still and radiant, whilst it shines above the hell of white waters that are tortured below.

III.—Lastly, notice the courageous confidence which comes from the Lord's victory.

"Be of good cheer." It is the old commandment that rung out to Joshua when, on the departure of Moses, the conduct of the war fell into his less experienced hands. "Be strong, and of a good courage; only be thou strong and very courageous." So says the Captain of Salvation, leaving His soldiers to face the current of the heady fight in the field. Like some leader who has climbed the ramparts, or hewed his way through the broken ranks of the enemies, and rings out the voice of encouragement and call to his followers, our Captain sets before us His own example: "I have overcome the world." He said this the day before Calvary. If that was victory, what would defeat have been?

Notice, then, how our Lord's life was a true battle. The world tried to draw Him away from God by appealing to things desirable to sense, as in the wilderness; or to things dreadful to sense, as on the

cross; and both the one and the other form of temptation He faced and conquered. It was no shadow fight which evoked this pæan of victory from His lips. The reality of His conflict is somewhat concealed from us by reason of its calm and the completeness of His conquest. We do not appreciate the force that drives a planet upon its path because it is calm and continuous and silent, but the power that kept Jesus Christ continually faithful to His Father, continually sure of that Father's presence, continually averse to all self-will and selfish living, was a power mightier than all others that have been manifested in the history of humanity. The Captain of our salvation has really fought the fight before us.

But mark, again, that our Lord's life is the type of all victorious life. The world conquers me when it draws me away from God, when it makes me its slave, when it coaxes me to trust it, and to despair if I lose it. The world conquers me when it comes between me and God, when it fills my desires, when it absorbs my energies, when it blinds my eyes to the things unseen and eternal. I conquer the world when I put my foot upon its temptations, when I crush it down, when I shake off its bonds, and when nothing that time and sense, with their delights or their dreadfuls, can bring, prevents me from cleaving to my Father with all my heart, and from living as His child here. Whoso thus coerces Time and Sense to be the servants of his filial love has conquered them both. And whoso lets them draw him away from God is beaten, however successful he may dream himself to be and men may call him.

My friends, there is a lesson for Manchester people.

Jesus Christ was not a very successful man according to the standard of Market Street and the Exchange. He made but a poor thing of the world, and He was going to be martyred on the cross the day after He said these words. And yet that was victory. Ay! Many a man beaten down in the struggle of daily life, and making very little of it, according to our vulgar estimate, is the true conqueror. Success means making the world a stepping-stone to God.

Still further, note our share in the Master's victory—"I have overcome the world. Be ye of good cheer." That seems an irrelevant way of arguing. What does it matter to me though He has overcome? So much the better for Him; but what good is it to me?

It may aid us somewhat to more strenuous fighting, if we know that a Brother has fought and conquered, and I do not under-estimate the blessing and the benefit of the life of Jesus Christ, as recorded in these Scriptures, even from that, as I conceive it, miserably inadequate and imperfect point of view. But the victory of Jesus Christ is of extremely little practical use to me, if all the use of it is to show me how to fight. Ah! you must go a deal deeper than that. "I have overcome the world, and I will come and put My overcoming Spirit into your weakness, and fill you with My own victorious life, and make your hands strong to war and your fingers to fight; and be in you the conquering and omnipotent power."

My friends, Jesus Christ's victory is ours, and we are victors in it, because He is more than the pattern of brave warfare, even He is the Son of God, who gave Himself for us, and gives Himself to us, and dwells in us our Strength and our Righteousness.

Lastly, remember that the condition of that victory's being ours is the simple act of reliance upon Him and upon it. The man who goes into the battle as that little army of the Hebrews did against the wide-stretching hosts of the enemy, saying, "O Lord! we know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee," will come out more than conqueror through Him that loved him. For "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."



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